Impressions of the USSR

SONYA RICHMOND

A Musical Journey Through the Soviet Union

PROGRESS PUBLISHERS · MOSCOW

Books in the IMPRESSIONS OF THE USSR SERIES put out by PROGRESS PUBLISHERS offer authentic accounts of life in the Soviet Union. Authors published in this series are eyewitnesses; they have all visited the Soviet Union and have seen life there at first hand. Theirs is an unbiased story about the men and women who transformed old Russia into one of the world's most advanced nations. Books in this series deal with a variety of topics analyzing the swiftly growing Soviet society.

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A Musical Journey Through the Soviet Union

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MOSCOW

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Музыкальное путешествие по Советскому Союзу

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TO JOHN AERON AND DYLAN
AND TO ALL SOVIET MUSICIANS

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Chapter 1

"There Is No Other Beginning Than Wonder"

(Plato)

My musical journey began with the sounds of an Indian raga. I was waiting in one of the departure lounges at London's Heathrow Airport to board the Aeroflot Ilyushin which was to fly me to Moscow. Scores of Indian men, women, children and babies were waiting too, and one bearded, beturbanned Sikh was quietly playing cassettes of Indian music on a small portable machine. I was the only British passenger in the lounge. I hadn't known Heathrow could look and sound like this. It seemed that I had left Britain already.

No, I wasn't in the wrong lounge. Indians fly home to Delhi via Moscow because it's a comparatively cheap way to do it. It works the other way too—from Delhi to London via Moscow.

I saw one of our pilots arrive dressed in the dark blue uniform of Aeroflot, the State Airline of the Soviet Union. Soon afterwards our flight was called and we all went out into the spring sunshine. We were coached out to the Ilyushin, a silver and blue long-nosed aircraft with a rectangle of bright red on its tail fin and the letters *CCCP* and a number beneath it.

I gazed at the aircraft with an excited lift of the heart. I love flying, and I love all kinds of aircraft; but this one was different. This one was going to fly me to the Soviet Union.

"Why don't you go by train? " my husband had asked. "It's a lot of fun." He'd gone to the Soviet Union that way six years before and had enjoyed every minute of the journey. I like trains too, and find them fun if I'm looking around Western Europe and am not in too much of a hurry, but to go that way to the Soviet Union was to me unthinkable. It takes all of three days from London. How could I possibly wait that long? I wanted to get there as quickly as

possible. It takes only three hours and forty minutes to fly. I could just about wait that long. Enough of patience, I thought, I want to get there.

The Ilyushin had three passenger compartments. All the Indians went into the rear one, and I found myself one of only three passengers in the middle compartment, which had seats for twenty-four. The usual "musical wallpaper" one hears on aircraft greeted me as I stepped on board.

I love that moment when an aircraft lifts off the earth. One is flying, flying up and away into an adventure. And what an adventure lay before me—a musical journey through the Soviet Union. Britain was left behind in an instant, and we flew up through the spring day, up and up through the clouds, above the clouds, across Europe and away to Russia, the land of my ancestors.

I buried my nose in a book but I was too excited to read, even though it was one of my favourite Steinbecks. I kept looking out of the window trying to see something, trying to look down through the clouds to see where we were.

The stewardesses brought us an elaborate meal with wine and dawdling over that took the best part of an hour. Two and a half hours to go ... two hours to go ... one and a half.... Surely we would soon be over the Baltic Sea. At last came the heart-stopping announcement, "Ladies and gentlemen, we are just entering Soviet air space. We are flying over Riga...."

Riga! That was where my grandmother was born. Was I dreaming? I looked out of the window but I couldn't see Riga as we were still above the clouds. We flew eastward and Moscow drew nearer and nearer. We came down through the clouds at last. I pressed my nose to the window for my first sight of the Soviet Union. There it lay below me, a white world of snow and deep dark forest which looked almost black from this height. In the space of a few hours I had left the spring behind and flown back into winter like Alice through the Looking Glass.

Moscow at last. We skimmed over the runway at Sheremetyevo Airport and the pilots set the big Ilyushin down as gently as a bird. I didn't feel the wheels touch the runway. I walked down the metal staircase and stepped for the first time onto Soviet soil. Two generations before me my family had fled from this land, right across Europe, never to see

Russia again. And now I had come back. There was something special to me about this country. A sense of adventure, of enquiry had brought me back, a love of knowledge, a love of culture, a love of things unknown had brought me back. I had to see it.

I have never thought that airports were particularly interesting to write about. They have always seemed to me to be hot, stuffy, bustling, noisy and overcrowded places full of clattering slot machines and teeming shops, like Heathrow which I had left far behind me, not so much in distance as in some essential spirit, the nature of which I sensed already and would come to understand.

Sheremetyevo is like no other airport I have ever seen. My first impression was of coolness and *quiet.* The Indians had all gone to another part of the building to make their connecting flight to Delhi and very few people besides myself were left. I had the impression of functional elegance in metals and dark polished stone. The floor was amazing, it looked like a sheet of dark glass. I'd heard that in 1980 workers had come to polish it for the Moscow Olympic Games and polish it they had! They had put upon it a sheen in which I could, in places, quite literally see my face. As this was several years after the event, what had it been like in the year of the Olympics? I had heard of the Soviets' passion for highly polished floors and had taken the precaution of having all the footwear I had brought with me fitted with rubber soles and heels.

The formalities of immigration, such as they were, took an incredibly short time and I was soon driving from the airport towards Moscow through broad avenues, past huge buildings to my hotel beside the Moskva River. Early in the year Moscow is three hours ahead of Britain in time, so it was already dusk. The lights were on all over the city. It was that bustling time of day when people are still hurrying home from work and there is a lot of traffic on the roads. But it wasn't nearly as noisy and hectic as other metropolises are at this time of the day.

At no time did I find Moscow a noisy city, not even in the rush hours. There was never any of that ear-splitting cacophony of rolling machinery, that shrieking of close-packed jostling humanity, that oppressive sense of being hemmed-in without enough fresh air to breath which makes

so many of the world's large cities so physically and spiritually distressing. Moscow is full of people (more than eight million at the last count), and skyscrapers and factories and building sites, but somehow I didn't feel that everything was pressing down on top of me, a feeling that had driven me away from critically overcrowded London back to the air and space and mountains of Wales.

My first perception of Moscow was that it is comfortable to be in. Perhaps it has something (or everything) to do with the fact that to the Soviets "Big Is Beautiful". Moscow is not built to the scale of man but to the ideal of Man. It is an enormous city of incredibly wide streets, broad pavements, and huge administrative and residential buildings. There is space for everyone. That is the difference.

Across the broad New Arbatsky bridge which spans the Moskva River was the colossal *Ukraina* Hotel in Kutuzovsky Avenue (named after Field-Marshal Mikhail Kutuzov, a hero of the Patriotic War of 1812). The *Ukraina* was to be home to me during my stay in Moscow. It is reputedly one of the tallest hotel buildings in the world, a giant thirty stories high which has over a thousand rooms and suites.

My suite had an entrance vestibule, a bed-sitting room, a bathroom and a balcony overlooking the river. I was curious to look at the bathroom to see if there was, or was not, a plug for the wash basin. A number of British people had warned me, "If you are going to the Soviet Union, don't forget to take a plug with you. You won't find one there." So I looked at the wash basin to see if it had a plug. It hadn't, and I'll tell you why. It is an old Russian custom which comes from the perfectly sound belief that running water is more hygienic to wash in than a static pool of murky suds. It is simply that. I hadn't brought a plug with me because I knew I wouldn't need one. That old Russian custom of washing in running water had come over to Britain with my grandparents. The bath had a plug of course, in fact the whole bathroom was a model of well-equipped efficiency with an overhead shower, a hand shower, mixer taps for the bath and lights over the long and short mirrors.

Moscow has the most amazing tap water I have ever tasted. It has the purity and the deep refreshing coldness of

water from a high mountain stream. I don't know what the Muscovites put in it, or don't put in it, but I found it remarkably good.

It was quite late by the time I had prowled around my new domain, unpacked and become used to my surroundings. My bed-sitting room was equipped, I was happy to see, with a fine big desk, and every piece of furniture one could possibly need. It also had a telephone, a television set, a radio and—thank goodness—a dial for turning off the central heating.

I listened to the radio while I was doing my unpacking. A few spins of the turning knob and I found a concert of Russian folk music. I was beginning to learn what happiness is. Happiness is flying to the Soviet Union, it is standing by a French window with a glass of cold water in one's hand, looking at the lights of Moscow shimmering on the Moskva River while listening to Russian folk music.

Happiness is thinking, "This is the first day of an adventure."

* * *

I was instantly overwhelmed by Moscow. There is a kind of sheer free-floating energy about the place which lifts the spirits and adds sparkle. It is only a few hours' flight from London, but one is set down in a far and distant place. It is like nowhere else I have ever seen. Here more than in any other city I have been in one can feel the concentrated vitality, the colossal driving-power of the people towards future. Moscow and its people are a mixture of yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Buildings as old as centuries stand cheek-to-jowl with huge modern skyscrapers.

I had flown into Moscow's end-of-winter. The air was cool and clean and dry, so I didn't want to wear my coat. And I did not, much to the astonishment of passers-by who were muffled to the ears in furs and woollens, their legs and feet encased in stout boots. Perhaps they couldn't yet believe that winter had loosened at last her icy grip and that five months of snow and black ice and frost, and sometimes a temperature of thirty degrees below zero, were actually melting into the recurring miracle of spring.

And spring was certainly coming, one could feel it in the air, but the snow was still piled high in the parks and

side streets, though it had long been cleared from main roads and thoroughfares. Everywhere around me still lay the evidence of a long winter, and during my first week in Moscow there were huge chunks of ice floating slowly down the river. The ground and the trees were bare, and Moscow, booted and befurred, still shivered under the cloud-fleecy sky. "I can't get used to it," one Muscovite told me, "I wear many layers of wool and cover my ears and try to keep out of the snow, and carry on as usual through the winter, but I'll never get used to it—never."

But that was only one side of the story. Another Muscovite said to me, "I like our winter and so do my wife and children. It's fiercely cold, of course, but if you have the right attitude to it, it can be a lot of fun."

I believed him. Dealing with the climate of Northern Russia is a state of mind. It has everything to do with individual temperament. I was to discover that not all but many Soviets actually enjoy their winter. Snow is lovely stuff, they say, to be skied and toboganned on, to take troika rides on in the park (and what fun that must be, I thought), and for children to tumble in and throw about.

Pushkin wrote, "...How healing is winter with its frosts and sleigh rides o'er the snow", and there are many customs, legends and songs about snow in Russian folklore. Perhaps the most famous are those about the Snow Maiden born of the snows, who melts in the spring sun, and Grandfather Frost whose hair is the blizzard and who breathes icicles.

The French writer Théophile Gautier writes lyrically of the Russian winter in his *Voyage en Russie.* He declares, "Il faut visiter les pays dans leurs saisons violentes, l'Espagne en été, la Russie en hiver." ("One should visit countries in their violent seasons, Spain in summer, Russia in winter.")

Ice is something else again. Some Soviets regard it as an enemy which can break the arms and legs of the unwary, while others joyfully unpack their skates. Love it or hate it, though, the Soviets clearly treat winter with respect and caution. Everywhere I went I saw massively framed double-glazed windows, their outer rims sealed up with broad white-linen sticky tape, and I saw doors thickly padded in leather or felt. I found that the central heating was a force to be

reckoned with in Moscow. The Soviets seem to love it, and who can blame them?

It is easy, I discovered, to distinguish the foreigners from the Soviets, the women at least. The foreigners wear silly boots out of doors, long and unlined and close-fitting with high heels (like the boots I was wearing!). But the Russian climate, the melting snow and the puddles soon told me what, and what not, to wear on my feet. After that first morning in Moscow I kept my elegant boots strictly for indoors.

Taxis are astonishingly cheap and easy to find because there are over eleven thousand taxis in Moscow. One can hail one in the street simply by raising the hand. The cost is twenty kopeks per kilometre plus twenty kopeks service charge, and that is all. Later that morning I took a drive through the busy streets, along boulevards so wide that I mistook them for piazzas, past heroic statuary, theatres, shops and leafless parks (in two weeks the leaves would magically appear).

Coming from the West where advertising is part of the landscape, the total absence of advertising here was amazing. Huge lorries drive by, painted in plain blue, drab-green or grey, bearing single unadorned words such as "bread", "milk", "meat", "fish". I was truly in a far and distant place, and this is part of the way the Soviets conduct their life. They simply don't need advertising.

The *kvas* kiosks were still closed for the winter but they would open again at the beginning of April. Women would sit by tanks of the refreshing liquid and sell it by the glassful to passers-by. *Kvas.* An old-fashioned, non-alcoholic, Russian country beer made from fermented rye bread. It doesn't sound very inviting but when the woman turns the tap and the *kvas* comes gushing into the glass pale brown and crystal clear, it looks wonderfully refreshing. It has an indefinable taste of the countryside, of fields and hedgerows, of green and growing things. Some foreigners don't like it. I found it strange and very pleasant. A Russian friend in London sent me the recipe and now I can make it myself.

We haven't got anything like *kvas* in Britain. The nearest thing I can think of is an old-fashioned Welsh country beer called *dio faen* (pronounced dee-o-vine) which is made, if you can believe me, from fresh stinging-nettles. Why

anyone would want to handle such a pernicious weed I cannot imagine, but it makes a nice fizzy drink. My husband, John Summers, in his novel *The Raging Summer* about life in Wales describes how his great-aunt Sarah used to make *dio faen* every year when the season was right. In my play of the same name, which is based on John's novel, I have included a scene in which aunt Sarah actually makes it. Would she, I wonder, have made *kvas* if she'd had the recipe? Probably she would have. Rye bread is easier on the hands that stinging-nettles!

There are a thousand lovely things to do in Moscow. For instance, one can take a boat trip along the Moskva River to the Gorky Park of Culture and Rest, and to the Lenin Hills where stands Moscow University. This is a leisurely and pleasant way of seeing the sights from an unusual viewpoint. Most people see Moscow by car. During the Stalin era several "vysotnye zdania" (tall buildings) were built in Moscow to add further interest to the skyline. One of these is the University, built between 1949 and 1953. It is set in a beautifully landscaped plot in the Lenin Hills which is the highest point in Moscow. From the top of its tower there is a panoramic view right across the city. Another of these "tall buildings" is the *Ukraina* Hotel.

Returning to the *Ukraina* for some lunch I switched on the radio and caught the last eight songs of Schubert's "Die Winterreise" sung in Russian by a baritone. I had been wondering for years what the Soviets did with Lieder, from the point of view of language. I was to learn through experience that sometimes they sing them in Russian and sometimes in the language of the composer. It is the choice of the singer. As this singer began "Im Dorfe" (In the Village) I was astonished at the grace and skill with which the translator had put Wilhelm Müller's rather undistinguished German poetry into such sonorous Russian. I have always been against the translation of Lieder into any language other than its own and in particular do I dislike it translated into English, a language I love but which doesn't "sing" easily unless the music is composed especially for it. But hearing the last part of "Die Winterreise" sung in Russian made me think again. The liquid sounds of the Russian language fitted the music almost as though made for it. It was strange, my ears had to get used to it, my mind had to

get used to it, but it sounded wonderful. I listened enthralled until the last melancholy chords of "Der Leiermann" (The Organ-Grinder) had died away. So that was what Lieder sounds like in Russian. Well, why not.

* * *

The march from Tchaikovsky's "Nutcracker" greeted me as I stepped out of the snow of a Moscow March into a sudden and unexpected world of beauty and enchantment. Was I in Fairyland? In a way I was. This was the Moscow State Musical Theatre for Children, the first—and for the moment—the only theatre of its kind in the world, and the afternoon performance was soon to begin.

A steady stream of hundreds of children of all ages flowed in front, around and behind me as I walked through the beautifully designed foyer in a daze of surprise and delight. On a bridge which spanned the foyer above my head, gaily costumed actors and children dressed as dancers and jesters bowed to the oncoming audience, greeting us with smiles and blown kisses. I looked around me in astonishment. A miniature post office had been set up in the foyer so that the children who liked writing to the singers, dancers, actors and other performers could do so and seal up their letters and put them in the special postbox. The postman who receives the mail is a brass bear.

And here was a doll to direct the children to the cloakroom area where they would leave their hats and coats. The very smallest children were provided with special pegs which were low enough for them to reach. In the Soviet Union it is the custom to discard outer clothing when indoors. If it hadn't been a full-sized theatre I might have felt like Gulliver in Lilliput.

The whole atmosphere of the theatre was vibrant with colour and warmth and expectancy, and the graceful airy design of the interior created an overwhelming impression of Fairyland which was enhanced by Tchaikovsky's music. A member of the staff welcomed me to the theatre and offered to show me around. "The music is to welcome the children," she said, "to put them in a happy frame of mind for the performance." This certainly was an inspired idea,

for everywhere around me I saw little faces shining with happiness.

I was to be told by many Soviets throughout my journey, "We do have a priviledged class in the Soviet Union. It is the children, they are the priviledged ones," and looking around me there was joyous and abundant evidence of this. Where else in the world is there a theatre created specifically with the delight, the cultural advancement, the comfort and the sheer convenience of children in mind? I did hear that other Children's Theatres are being planned in other Soviet republics but, while I was in the Soviet Union, Moscow's was unique. And those children who are lucky enough to be able to visit the Theatre will never forget the experience. I certainly never will.

The Moscow State Musical Theatre for Children is the brainchild of its director and principal designer, Natalia Satz, People's Artiste of the USSR, Laureate of the State Prize of the USSR. She was appointed director of the first Theatre for Children in the world, which her initiative brought into being. This dedicated woman has devoted more than sixty years of her life to the theatre and her work has received worldwide recognition. With the creation of the Children's Theatre she aimed to make high Art accessible to the little ones of the Soviet Union, to impart to the children a love of the higher things of life. The immense aesthetic influence of the Theatre's performances has inspired composers and choreographers from all over the Soviet Union to create new works especially for the Theatre, the new building of which was opened in 1979.

Leaving the foyer on my way to the auditorium I crossed a hall containing three large rectangular sculptured panels suspended from the lofty ceiling. The first one depicted Bayan, the ancient folk singer and teller of fairy tales, playing a *gusli*, a Russian instrument of the zither genre. The gusli is used by Rimsky-Korsakov in his opera *Sadko*, and the sound of the gusli is imitated by Glinka in his opera, *Ruslan and Ludmilla*. The second panel depicted Orphée with dolphins and fishers, and the third was Lel the shepherd from Rimsky-Korsakov's opera *The Snow Maiden*. Lel is surrounded by a fox, squirrels, owls and singing birds.

One then moves into the next room's special light, the oblique semi-darkness of a place alive with large wall pa-

nels in painted lacquered wood in the traditional Russian folk style. The panels represent characters from the world of music, literature and folklore. Here are Romeo and Juliet, Ruslan and Ludmilla, Sniegourochka the Snow Maiden, Russalka the water nymph, Levsha the left-handed craftsman of the fairy tale, Yuri Olyesha's Three Fat Men, and characters from Mozart's *The Magic Flute* and Kipling's *The Jungle Book*. I found it difficult to tear myself away from this dramatically colourful room and kept returning to gaze again. Each time I went back there were knots of children, pointing and questioning before each of the panels. This room, with its grand piano, is used by the children for lectures and discussions about the performances. A member of the theatre staff is always on hand to answer questions and listen to the children's ideas.

I came to a room "for little brothers and sisters" where very small chidren can play and sing and learn the alphabet while their elders are watching the performance. This room is a rainbow-land of toys, stuffed animals, dolls, miniature cars and building blocks. A piano stands against one wall. There is a puppet theatre designed and constructed by Galina Speshneva, and the children can play with the puppets if they wish. The walls of this bright toyland are hung with collages made of silk which depict bluebirds and flowers in luminous colours. These were specially designed and made for the Children's Theatre. The numerous tiny chairs are made in Khokhloma, a Russian folk art in which wood is lacquered in black, red and gold.

I next saw an art gallery where parents can wait for their children. Anyone without a ticket can see the performance on colour television. The walls of the gallery are hung with collages, paintings, drawings and wall-hangings in felt appliqué.

One goes up wide shallow steps, past tall windows, halls and archways. Everywhere there are beautiful plants and sometimes even trees. Here is an airy ceiling-high cage of exotic birds and plants, there is a grand piano—and another—and yet another, and at last one enters the auditorium with its twelve hundred seats. These are steeply raked so that even the smallest child can see the performance without difficulty.

All cultural activities in the Soviet Union are subsidized

by the State and the Children's Theatre receives a donation from the State of three roubles for every ticket. The seats cost from thirty kopeks to one rouble twenty kopeks.

To my surprise I saw that there are three stages, the main one flanked by two smaller ones. We were to see the children's opera, *Maximka* by Terentiev. Boris Terentiev was born in Odessa in 1913 and was elected President of the Moscow branch of the USSR Composer's Union in 1979. His children's opera *Maximka* is a rollicking sea-tale of sailors and a little black boy (Maximka) whom they befriend. One of their number, however, sells the boy into slavery and the final part of the opera deals with the sailors' efforts to save him, which of course they do. All ends happily with Maximka becoming a real sailor, living and working on board the ship with his kind and loving comrades. This is a real opera for children, the music somewhere between grand opera and musical comedy. The story is one to enthrall any child and the music is filled with melodies that children can remember and sing themselves.

In the interval the refreshments were all of the kind that children like—orange and other fruit juices, fruit tarts with meringue on top, and bread with cheese and ham and sausage. At the end of the performance the children streamed towards the cloakroom and donned their thick woollen (sometimes fur) coats and hats. Some of the boys wore miniature *shapkas*, those Russian-style hats made of leather and lined with fur, with fur-lined flaps for covering the ears. Some of the smaller children were so warmly bundled up by their mothers that they looked like little living *Matryoshka* dolls (the Matryoshka is the famous Russian painted wooden nest of dolls, one inside the other, which fascinates children all over the world).

As I left the Theatre I thought, "I know where Fairyland is. It isn't at the end of the rainbow, it's right here in Moscow."

* * *

The Metro in Moscow is one of the most amazing sights in the Soviet Union. One walks down from the street into the caves of Alladin. The Kievskaya and Belorusskaya metro stations were conveniently near my hotel and when I first

saw them I could scarcely believe my eyes. The stations are more like Tsarist palaces than anything else. They are enormous, incredibly luxurious, and brilliant with crystal chandeliers. To get to the wide, fast-moving escalators one crosses vast areas of glowing mosaics and ornamental pavements, past marble-finished walls and bronze groups of statuary. Marble benches are provided for weary travellers to sit down and rest.

The Metro was inaugurated in the 1930s and lies deep under the city, so deep in fact that travellers sometimes have to take several steep escalators to get down to the level of the trains. Several architects were each assigned a metro station to design, and were given a theme—for instance "The Struggle for Freedom", "Agriculture" and so on. The vast halls they designed are resplendent beyond belief. There are paintings on the high, vaulted ceilings which are bedecked with arc-lamps encased in alabaster. The brilliant lights shining through the translucent stone transform the icestone walls into a deep and mysterious lake-blue, and gild the tiled walls with shimmering pink and gold.

The pure-white tunnels are brilliantly lit and vast in comparison with the trains, which look like toys as they come gliding in alongside the immaculately clean platforms. Even the waste-bins are so handsome that I simply didn't recognize them for what they were.

Several Muscovites proudly told me that their Metro is the finest in the world, which I found easy to believe having seen the metros of other countries. "The trains run on time," said another. "You wouldn't believe how cheap it is to travel on the Metro," said yet another. I would. The fare is five kopeks regardless of distance, and another five kopeks for each piece of luggage not exceeding one metre long and twelve inches wide with the exception of skis. Anything larger is not allowed because if everyone took large pieces of luggage, the trains would become congested, so the rule is for the comfort of all passengers.

It is easy to find Moscow's Metro stations. They are marked with large M signs which are illuminated at night. The trains run from six o'clock in the morning until one o'clock in the morning. On holidays they run an hour longer. During the rush hours the trains leave the stations

every ninety seconds, and about six million passengers use the Metro every day.

* * *

"I have always thought dried grasses were beautiful," I said to Vladimir Uporin. "I put them in vases about the house in winter when flowers are scarce, but who would have thought of making them into a mobile? "

We were at the Ministry of Culture and were standing in a lofty round hall leading from the foyer. Above our heads was a large mobile of incredibly intricate and graceful design. I thought of the unknown, unsung artist and wondered what order of man would spend days, weeks perhaps, of his life creating a thing of beauty and originality from so fragile and impermanent a substance as dried grass.

Vladimir Uporin is head of the department which deals with music schools and scientific establishments. He told me that the Russian Federation (The Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic), by far the largest of the Soviet republics, in which Moscow is situated, has seven thousand music schools, several thousand professors, and one million, three hundred and fifty thousand music students. Seven to eight years are devoted to the study of music and pupils attend their classes twice a week, starting at the age of seven. Vladimir Uporin told me this as we were going up in the lift to his office. When we were seated he continued to tell me about music education in his country.

"There are three levels of musical education all over the Soviet Union," he said. "The second level is the beginning of the students' professional training, and the highest grades are taught at the Conservatoire."

In the Russian Federation there are a hundred and seventy philharmonic societies, fifty symphony orchestras, eighty-five chamber groups, forty-two folk orchestras and eighty-six folk dance ensembles. Foreign operas are often performed in Russian and sometimes in the language of the composer. I heard of a Russian *Carmen* and a Russian *Turandot,* and even Berlioz is sometimes performed in Russian. Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* and Benjamin Britten's *Peter Grimes* and *Billy Budd* are performed in English.

"In the fourth, fifth and sixth years," said Vladimir

Uporin, "the pupils' studies include musical literature and, at the higher levels, the history of music. Piano, all the instruments of the orchestra, and folk instruments are studied in the schools according to the individual's innate abilities and preferences."

"Do many students elect to study ancient instruments? " I asked.

"A minority choose to study harpsichord and other ancient instruments," he replied. "This instruction is available from specialist teachers. Most students prefer to study modern instruments."

"At what age do singers begin serious study? " I asked.

"At eighteen."

"And choirs? "

"The conducting of choirs is another specialist subject," he said.

Uporin told me about Siberian-born violinist, Victor Tretyakov, the son of a military musician, who became a professional musician after completing the second level of his musical education. Now in his late thirties, Tretyakov has gained a reputation both in the Soviet Union and in the West. I also heard about the amazing eleven year old Vadim Repin, also from Siberia, who won first prize in an international violin competition in Czechoslovakia.

In the Russian Federation, musical instruction is primarily in Russian, but the students must also take a State examination in Italian. Upon returning to their native republics after completing their training in Moscow, they may teach or perform in the language of their own republic if they wish. "There are a hundred and sixty languages and dialects spoken in the Soviet Union," said my host as we parted.

All music studies are free of charge in the Soviet Union. Board and lodging is also free. The State pays hundreds of millions of roubles for instruments, music scores, libraries, and hostels. When training is complete the post-graduates return to their home republics where they are assured of a job. There is a special competition for post-graduates the winners of which can choose where they want to work outside their home republic. No one need fear unemployment, no matter how remote the place in which they choose to live. There has been no unemployment in the Soviet Union since 1930. Mikhail Shkunov, who was born in 1905, a

metal worker's apprentice and later a soldier in the Red Army, was the last unemployed person in the Soviet Union. After he got a permanent job at the Red Tanner factory on March 13th 1930 the labour exchange closed down for good. Shkunov fought at the front in the Battle of Stalingrad during what the Soviets call the Great Patriotic War (1941-1945). He was severely wounded in both legs and was awarded a medal for courage.

* * *

The Museum of Theatre Art in Bakhrushin Street was founded in 1894 by theatre-lover and collector Alexei Bakhrushin in whose former home it is housed. It contains theatrical costumes, playbills, programmes, manuscripts, rare editions, scenic designs and two hundred thousand photographs.

There is a room dedicated to the art of the great Russian operatic bass Feodor Chaliapin (1873-1938). I stared fascinated at his theatrical costumes. Here was one of the jewelled robes he wore for his role of Boris. Mussorgsky's opera *Boris Godounov* was first produced at St. Petersburg on February 8, 1874 and the leading role was first sung by Chaliapin in 1899 when he was twenty six. And here was the heavy cloak, blood-red and incredibly long, the pointed shoes and demon hat which Chaliapin wore for his role of Mephistopheles in Gounod's opera *Faust.* I saw that these were the robes of a man awesomely more than two metres in height. Indeed, Chaliapin did have an unusually imposing physique even for a Russian bass.

Whenever I visited museums before in my travels throughout the world the attendants were uniformed men and women. One expects to see them. So I was surprised when I discovered that the irreplaceable exhibits in this museum were watched over by *babushkas* (grandmothers) in everyday clothes and sloppy, comfortable shoes. They plodded about quietly, keeping a very careful eye on their charges.

Here was a pair of shoes made of soft kid skin, one of the hundreds of pairs of dancing shoes which Wacław Niżyński had had made in London. Nizyński's shoes! He was the only dancer in the world who could ever execute the *entrechat dix.* It has been said of him that he seemed to

hover in the air, his feet flickering like the wings of a moth, defying the law of gravity. And these shoes had been on those miraculous feet!

In the same showcase was a pair of Tamara Karsavina's shoes together with innumerable programmes of the Ballets Russes; programmes of Stravinsky's *Firebird,* Adam's *Gisèlle,* Schumann's *Carnaval,* Arensky's *Cleopatre* and all manner of ballets set to the music of Glinka, Rimsky-Korsakov, Mussorgsky and Glazounov. There was a programme of a performance by Anna Pavlova who was with Diaghilev's Ballets Russes for two seasons. I could not tear myself away.

What must it have been like, I thought, to have been in Paris on the evening of May 19, 1909, the opening night of the Ballets Russes' first season in the West. I tried to imagine Niżyński in Fokine's *Le Pavillon d'Armide* and his *pas de deux* with Karsavina in *Festin.* And what must it have been like to see *Les Sylphides* with not only Niżyński and Karsavina but the immortal Pavlova dancing to Chopin's orchestrated music, choreographed by Fokine.

What a galaxy of artistic talent had sat around the table in Diaghilev's house in St. Petersburg planning to stun the West with Russian concepts of beauty—Lev Bakst, Alexander Benois, Nikolai Roerich, Mstislav Doboujinsky, Mikhail Fokine, Nikolai Tcherepnin....

Diaghilev's Ballets Russes represented a split with the traditions of the Imperial Russian Ballet. While taking advantage of the Imperial School's rigorous technical training, Diaghilev managed to persuade many of the Imperial dancers to set out with him upon an adventure, a voyage of artistic discovery. Although their repertoire included the classical ballets so beloved by audiences, the chief influence on the Ballets Russes was the music of Rimsky-Korsakov, Stravinsky, De Falla, Debussy, and that group of modernists, all born between 1888 and 1899, based in Paris and known as "Les Six". These were Louis Durey, Arthur Honegger, Darius Milhaud, Germaine Tailleferre, Georges Auric, and Francis Poulenc.

"Please, comrade, do not touch the glass," said a quiet voice in Russian. A babushka was standing beside me. I had been so enthralled at seeing all these exhibits that I had leaned over the showcase trying not to miss the smallest

detail. There is always the same problem in museums. Does one skim around trying, impossibly, to see everything or does one concentrate on relatively few things at a time, absorbing every detail. Impossible to decide. One can never see enough. But I had seen the shoes of Niżyński and Karsavina!

* * *

Moscow is rightly considered one of the world's greatest centres of musical art. Once in every four years it becomes the venue of the Tchaikovsky International Music Competition, one of the most prestigious in the world. The Moscow Conservatoire, also named after Tchaikovsky, is the oldest in the Soviet Union. It celebrated its centennial in 1966. The Moscow Conservatoire and Symphony concerts were founded by Nikolai Rubenstein (brother of Anton) and conducted by Tchaikovsky. I keenly looked forward to attending my first concert in this famous and historic place.

Here I was in the Moscow Conservatoire with the orchestra tuning up. It is an ornately decorated hall with fixed wooden seats. The two side walls are adorned with large oval portraits of the world's great composers in two long lines. Nearest to the stage, and on either side of it, are Tchaikovsky and Glinka. All the great ones are there—Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, Wagner—all the great luminaries of the world.

The concert was to be given by the Chamber Orchestra of the Republic of Lithuania under the direction of S. Sondeckis. It was a Bach and Mozart programme beginning with a Bach String Suite after which the soloist, Dmitri Bashkirov, played Bach's Fourth Piano Concerto. The tall, elegant, black-bearded Bashkirov followed this with the Concert Rondo K. 382 by Mozart and it was then that I discovered a charming custom which I was to see wherever I went in the Soviet Union. As the musicians acknowledged the applause, several members of the audience left their seats and presented little bouquets of flowers to the soloist and the conductor. Just a few flowers at a time, four or five tulips, two or three carnations, enclosed in thin tubes of cellophane. What a perfectly delightful custom, what a graceful tribute to a fine performance. After the interval

Bashkirov, Sondeckis and the orchestra returned to give us a performance of Mozart's Piano Concerto number 20 K. 466, and then I heard for the first time the slow handclapping which is the Soviet indication of high approval (and which indicates just the opposite in Britain). I had to get used to it. The audience handclapped in rhythm for a full ten minutes before the performers were allowed to leave.

As I descended the main staircase I noticed, down in the foyer, a huge painting of the Russian national composers in a conversational group. I was to hear much of their music during my journey through the Soviet Union.

I was up bright and early the following morning as I was going to visit Tchaikovsky's house in the village of Klin, but first there was the matter of breakfast. I had fallen into the habit of eating breakfast in handy buffets for the sake of speed. More leisurely visitors to the Soviet Union prefer to have breakfast in restaurants but if you want to "eat and run" the buffets are designed for this purpose. The quality of the food in Moscow is uniformly high wherever you eat. The system in a buffet is the same as that in a cafeteria or canteen in Britain. You take a tray, choose what you want from the display in the glass counter and pay the woman at the end after she sums up the total on a wooden abacus. I'm told that addition on one of these things is simpler than on a modern adding machine. So much for modern inventions!

I found that food is astonishingly cheap in the Soviet Union. Wherever I went I was continually surprised at how little it costs to eat really well. On my first morning in Moscow I found a breakfast which I liked so much that I had the same every morning during my weeks in the Soviet capital—a half-litre bottle of *keffir* (somewhat like yoghurt but less solid, one drinks it from a glass), and one of several superb double-cream cheeses wrapped in silver foil. The most delicious was called Yantar and it was perfect with Russian black sour rye bread. What a breakfast, and how the taste of that marvellous bread took me straight back to the days of my childhood and my growing up. Coming from a Russian Jewish family, Russian black sour bread, easily available in Jewish delicatessen in Britain, was—together with smoked salmon and double-cream cheese—part of the

staple diet in our house, and one of my earliest memories.

"May I sit here?" On my first morning in Moscow a Russian man had brought his tray to my table in the fast-filling buffet. "But of course," I said and he put his tray down. I couldn't believe it. Was all this food just for him? How could one person possibly get through it—and first thing in the morning too? But get through it he did. First a plate of beef Stroganov with a pile of little mushrooms topped with thick heavy cream. With this he ate several pieces of black bread and drank two glasses of tea. After that he had pickled fish with a mixed salad and several slices of white bread, and then a bowl of cooked cereal which I afterwards found out was semolina cooked with sugar and topped with melted butter. He then drank a glass of freshly squeezed fruit juice—in Moscow apple juice appeared to be the most popular although several kinds of fruit juice were always available. My table companion ended his breakfast with two puff pastries stuffed with fresh cream (I did not see any artifical cream in the Soviet Union). I looked at him. He was big-boned and tall and thick-fleshed, but there was no fat on him at all.

Each morning different people came to share my table and I was soon to realize that what had seemed to me to be a Gargantuan breakfast was neither more nor less than that eaten by the average Muscovite on his or her way to work. Rather it was I who excited comment because my small breakfast (although it was enough for me) did not seem to the Russians who shared my table to be proper eating at all.

"Ah, so you are British," exclaimed one woman, "that explains it. The British and the French are well known in our country for their small appetites."

She had just put away a large bowl of buttered semolina, a plate of fried liver with sauerkraut, two hard-boiled eggs with black bread, a glass of tomato juice, two slices of chocolate cake and one of the big golden apples which were always available in the buffets I frequented. She stirred her glass of tea, tasted it, plainly showed her disbelief and dumped in six large cubes of sugar.

Two Estonians in Moscow on business came to my table one morning. Their breakfast was an elaborate affair of red caviare with crispbread, a large glass each of *smetana* (thick sour cream), cold meats with mixed salad, black and white

bread, several glasses of tea, shrimps with sliced cucumber, and cheesecake topped with blackcurrant conserve. They looked askance at what they called my "British breakfast" and protested so much that I would surely faint away before lunch time for lack of sustenance that, impelled partly by politeness and partly by the luscious appearance of the cheesecake, I got myself some and ate it with relish although I had to leave some of my *keffir* to make room for it.

On the morning of my visit to Tchaikovsky's house in Klin, I shared a table with a Muscovite woman who, to my astonishment, breakfasted on two soft-boiled eggs, white bread, and tea. How British can you get? There was one kind of food which I never saw while I was in the Soviet Union and that was dried breakfast cereals of the kind which British people eat with cold milk and sugar. The Soviets wouldn't regard that as food on which to start a day's work.

Soon after breakfast I drove out of Moscow on the road which leads northwest to Leningrad. I was on my way to Klin, which is about sixty kilometres from Moscow. Not far beyond the outskirts of the capital there loomed on my left a simple but impressive monument made of iron girders aranged in X-shapes. This marked the place where the Nazis were stopped by the Soviet Army as they tried to enter Moscow in 1941. Rearing starkly against the sky the monument is forever a reminder of what might have happened had it not been for the stamina and determination of the Soviet forces.

One man told me: "I was in the Soviet Army and took part in that battle outside Moscow. I will never forget it, how could any of us ever forget? "

I passed the settlement of Solnechnogorsk (Sunny Hills) and Lake Senezhskoye, a large reservoire which was originally part of a scheme devised by Peter the Great for the large-scale canalization of the area. Senezhskoye is popular with anglers and hikers.

On this particular day, once Moscow was left behind, I could see that winter still lay upon the land, for the snow thickly covered the ground right up to the dark mysterious line of the pine forest. Set back but a short distance from the wide motorway, this forest stretched all the way to

Klin. Moscow is a city in a forest, it is girdled by primordial wildwood.

The motorway was clearly one much used by foreigners for, although most of the road signs were in Cyrillic, I noticed that some of them were also in Roman letters. Some of the bus-stop shelters on either side of the road were beautifully decorated with mosaics and lacquered wood in rainbow colours. The shelters are of modern design and construction and the decorations depict scenes from the life of the Soviet people. Strange land of contrasts—here the fairytale bus-shelters and there, just over there, the deep-dark forest stretching endlessly.

I passed village after village along the way, each one with its quaint wooden houses painted in reds, greens, yellows, and blues, the very quintessence of Old Russia. The houses are sturdily built to withstand all weathers and look strong enough to withstand the next hundred years.

There were many gaily bedecked wedding cars on the motorway. Saturday is a non-working day for many Soviet people and therefore a good day on which to get married. I saw one wedding party leaving one of the lovely old wooden houses. There is a trend towards leaving the countryside and living and working in the towns and cities, and so, as constant demand for modern flats is fulfilled, more and more of these houses will be deserted, fall into disrepair, and be demolished. I for one will be sad to see them go, although not every Soviet person I met shared my feelings.

At length I passed the village of Frolovskoye where Tchaikovsky composed his Fifth Symphony and completed (in 1890) his opera *The Queen of Spades*, the libretto of which, as with so many Russian operas, is based on Pushkin. Many people who love Tchaikovsky's music have been puzzled as to why he was so dissatisfied with, and so mistaken about, his Fifth Symphony, which has been considered one of his greatest works since its first appearance in 1888. A few more kilometres and I arrived in Klin and there, surrounded by deep snow, was Tchaikovsky's house, which has now been extended and made into a memorial museum. It contains some fifteen thousand exhibits all in some way connected with the composer. I entered the winter-haunted house and wondered what to look at first. Fortunately the

matter is taken out of one's hands for an official guide shows visitors around. Obviously it would never do to allow anyone who wished to wander around unescorted among all those irreplaceable, and sometimes breakable, objects.

I found myself one of a group of visitors. We were all given grey cloth slippers to pull on over our boots to protect the varnished wooden floors of the old, gently creaking house. Then we looked at rooms and rooms full of furniture, books, photographs, and *objets d'art* in glass cases. Here was a portrait, and yet another, of Nadezhda von Meck, Tchaikovsky's benefactress. He never spoke to her nor did they meet socially, although they once passed each other in the street, man and woman bowing to each other wordlessly. Here was the dining room where Tchaikovsky ate with his friends and colleagues, and here the elegant salon where stands Tchaikovsky's grand piano and his writing desk. Every year on May 7 and November 6 (his birthday and the anniversary of his death) special concerts are performed in this salon by outstanding Soviet musicians. May 7 is a glorious day in music because not only was Tchaikovsky born on that day but Brahms as well (in 1833), seven years before him.

I stood fascinated before a glass-fronted wardrobe containing a conductor's baton and some of Tchaikovsky's clothes, a row of impeccably tailored suits, hats with curly brims, a tall black shiny top hat, several cravats and pairs of gloves. Obviously he cared about the way he looked (unlike some composers) and dressed in the high fashion of the day. It was an eerie feeling looking at these clothes which had once enclosed the living body of one of the world's greatest composers. The clothes at once brought him closer to us as a human being and at the same time, because he would never wear them again, he seemed all the more lost to us.

Adjacent to the salon is Tchaikovsky's simple bedroom with its narrow bed. In one corner stands a small round table at which he is said to have written his Sixth Symphony in B minor, the "Pathétique". Tchaikovsky died in St. Petersburg on November 6, 1893, only nine days after he had conducted the premiers of the symphony at the Russian Music Society. Walking around his house I think I shed a few tears, partly from gratitude for his life and partly

because he was only fifty-three when he died. It was far too young, but I'm not certain that Tchaikovsky thought so.

Being a visiting foreign author I was invited to write my impressions in the visitors' book. I was so overwhelmed by being in Tchaikovsky's house that I could think of little else to write but that I was indeed overwhelmed by the experience, but I also wrote that Tchaikovsky's wonderful music has sweetened my life since I was very small child.

* * *

By the time I arrived back in Moscow I had little over an hour to get showered and changed for the opera. This was to be Rimsky-Korsakov's *May Night* at the Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko Musical Theatre in Pushkinskaya Street. This is a ballet and opera theatre which seats fourteen hundred people and where classical and modern operas, ballets, and operettas are performed.

I have always regretted that only a handful of Rimsky-Korsakov's operas are performed in Britain. We see *The Golden Cockerel* from time to time and *Sadko* very occasionally. *The Snow Maiden* had great success when it was produced at the Sadler's Wells Theatre in London. *Mozart and Salieri* and *The Tsar's Bride* have both been broadcast on the radio, and that is about all. As for his other operas, we in Britain are sometimes lucky enough to obtain recordings from the Soviet Union, but these are few and far between. So it was with the greatest pleasure that I listened to a broadcast on the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) in the late 1970s of *May Night.* I instantly fell under the spell of the glorious music. This lovely opera has so seldom been performed outside Russia since its first performance that I had never seen it performed on stage anywhere in Europe. This evening's performance was to be a singular experience in a lifetime of opera-going which stretches back to my very first *Madame Butterfly* when I was six year old.

May Night is a dramatization of a story by Gogol. It is a folk-fairy opera in three acts set in the Ukrainian country-side, and was written the same year as Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin. May Night* is a feast of colour, dancing and spectacle and is an enchanting blend of lyricism, fantasy,

and broad peasant comedy. The stage sets were a wonderful re-creation of a Ukrainian village with its gaily costumed people, and the producer's interpretation of this fanciful work made this an operatic experience never to be forgotten. The acting, the dancing and, above all, the singing were the work of an inspired team.

Rimsky-Korsakov found in the folklore, dances and songs of the people of his country the themes, rhythms, and harmonies which so enrich his music. Nowhere is this more gloriously evident than in *May Night* which had its premiere at the Mariinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg in 1880. The chorus that night had a singular member—the father of Igor Stravinsky.

At the end of his life Rimsky-Korsakov became Igor Stravinsky's first music professor when Stravinsky was a young law student. In 1911 Stravinsky returned to St. Petersburg from a holiday in Switzerland with the score of *Petrushka* which he had conceived while he was there. The Russian folk songs woven into the score are taken from no less than eleven collections including that of his late professor, Rimsky-Korsakov, who had collected a hundred songs, and the collection made by Tchaikovsky. By the way, Stravinsky made a remark, which I like, about his own work. "My music," he said, "is best understood by children and animals."

In *May Night* the composer displays his most vital and luminous gifts—exotic melody, a brilliant richness of orchestration and, when he needs it, a heart-stopping lyricism. If his operas, so far as the libretti are concerned, are somewhat lacking in psychological intensity or in drama, we must remember that Rimsky-Korsakov had a natural ability to depict the exotic and the fantastic in orchestral and vocal terms and was less at ease with more realistic subjects. We who love his music must accept him on his own terms. When I heard the broadcast of *May Night* and again when I saw this production in Moscow, it seemed to me that the most ravishing music is in the third act in the scene which takes place beside the lake, in front of a haunted house. Here the spirit of a girl who drowned herself in despair because of the hatred of her stepmother appears as a Pannochka (a russalka) to Levko, the hero. Levko and his father, the village headman, are rivals for the hand of Hanna

but, with the help of the russalka, Levko wins her. The music of this beautiful scene is superb. Rimsky-Korsakov's use of the harp to depict magical happenings has never been more masterly. I can understand, though, why this opera, like some wines, will not travel. It belongs uniquely to its own country and if one wants to see it one must go there.

* * *

To a music lover the radio in the Soviet Union is a source of endless delight. When time permitted I listened avidly and soon learned that the Soviet people have a love for Viennese operetta and the music of the Strauss family. The first time I listened to Soviet radio I heard Strauss's *Tales from the Vienna Woods* after hearing the last part of Schubert's *Die Winterreise*. I also heard Strauss's overture to his operetta *Die Fledermaus*. The second time I switched on I heard *Voices of Spring* and *Artist's Life*; then came Franz Lehár's Vilia from *The Merry Widow;* but this time she was a Russian witch of the woods. "You are my Heart's Delight" from *The Land of Smiles* was also sung in Russian. I also heard a great deal of music by French composers including the ballet music from Delibes' *Coppélia*, the can-can from Offenbach's *Orpheus in the Underworld,* the *Carnival of Animals* by Saint-Saëns, and Berlioz's dramatic symphony "Roméo et Juliette".

A feature of Soviet radio is that every morning fifteen minutes' air time are devoted to keep-fit exercises. Many Soviet people stop work for this short time to exercise to the accompaniment of cheerful music played on a piano in strict tempo with movements called out by an instructor. "And bend and up and stretch and down and...."

The tunes played on the keep-fit programme never ceased to astonish me. One was "The Elephant Never Forgets", that oom-pa-pa little old piano piece with the tune in the left hand which any child can play. But how on earth did *that* get to the Soviet Union? Do Soviet children play it too? And when a fast waltz was required on the programme (for an arm-swinging exercise perhaps), the old black-keys warhorse "Chopsticks" was sometimes brought out, dusted off and put to good use. How did that get to the Soviet Union? Well, it seems to have been already there in Russia

in the last century, because in the spring of 1878, Borodin, Rimsky-Korsakov, Cui, and Lyadov decided to collaborate on a set of piano variations on the "Chopsticks" theme. It was Borodin's idea and it turned out very well, so well in fact that Liszt, one of the greatest pianists in the world, expressed his approval of the charming little pieces by adding one of his own.

"I could have danced all night" from *My Fair Lady* put in an appearance several times and so did Strauss's "The Blue Danube" and "Whistle while you work" from Walt Disney's film *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. One morning we were invited to put our feet in the second ballet position (feet apart and turned outwards) and then to stretch alternate legs out straight with feet arched and toes pointed on the ground. "And stretch—and down—and stretch—and down...." I could scarcely believe my ears because the piano was playing "Auld Lang Syne". How many Soviets, I wondered, would know the meaning of this Scottish title? How many British people would know it either? Probably it has another name in the Soviet Union. I wonder what they call "The Elephant Never Forgets"?

The morning's keep-fit programme would often be followed by a symphony concert or a piano or song recital. I was always happy when the concert was of Russian folk music. It's marvellous and exhilarating and I could never hear enough of it. Fortunately the Soviets lay it on with the tap water.

* * *

I visited several music schools in Moscow and what a joy that was. Valery Starodubrovsky, the director of the Gnesin Music Institute, told me that the Institute was founded by three sisters and a brother of the Gnesin family especially to train teachers. It is now the State Musical and Pedagogic Institute under the Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation.

"We teach all the instruments of the orchestra, piano, singing, theory, history of music, and composition," explained Valery Starodubrovsky. "There is another faculty where we teach folk instruments—bayan, balalaika, domra, and mandolin, and a further faculty where we teach the

conducting of choirs. And," he added, "we have a special department for folk singing."

"Which language do you use?" I asked.

"That is a problem which we had to solve," he replied. "There are so many languages and dialects in the Soviet Union. There is a linguistics unit where the different dialects of the Russian Federation are studied, and some of them are very far from Russian so we have to make some adjustments."

"Does gypsy music come into this?" I asked.

"No, that comes under the heading of Light Music. There is a school opposite here for that kind of music."

I learned that there are several Gnesin establishments where students are taught on three levels—from the age of six, from the age of fourteen, and from the age of 18-19.

"We have Friday evening performances of opera, oratorio, and chamber music. Would you like to come next Friday? There will be a performance of Haydn's *The Seasons*."

"Thank you, I'll certainly come if I can," I replied.

"Come and meet some of our professors and students," he suggested.

In the Department of Song I met professors Zara Dolukhanova, Tatiana Tagarinova, and Natalia Shpiller, the latter a former leading singer in the Bolshoi company. They showed me dozens of photographs of their students and prize winners.

"Yevgeny Svetlanov, the conductor, is a graduate of the Gnesin. Do you know of him?"

"Oh, yes," I said. "He often comes to Britain to conduct. He is very popular indeed."

"Khrennikov, the Chairman of Composers of the USSR is also a Gnesin graduate," they told me, and they went on to mention other world-famous musicians who had trained at the Institute.

Professor Tagarinova invited me into a studio where one of her advanced students, Natalia Zelenina, was singing Schubert's setting of *The King of Thule* from *Faust* by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832). She had a fine soprano voice and she sang the song in Russian. There are no less than four settings by Lieder composers of this poem—that of Johann Friedrich Reichardt ed. 1809, of Carl Friedrich Zelter ed. 1812, Franz Schubert's op. 5, No. 5

(the most famous setting of the four, 1816) and that of Franz Liszt ed. 1843.

I then went into the Department of Folk Music which has existed since 1978. I listened to Zhenia Krivenko from Stavropol, a city located in the south of the Russian Federation. She was a first year student of folk music and she sang a plaintive song from South Kazakhstan.

"Zhenia, what is your ambition?" I asked.

"To be a soloist," she answered.

"And do you play any folk instruments?"

"Oh, yes, I accompany myself on the bayan."

She then sang a Cossack folk song and the flatter vowel sounds indicated that it was in a dialect somewhat removed from Russian. She was accompanied on the piano by her teacher, Ludmilla Shamina, herself a graduate of the Gnesin.

I spent an engaging morning listening to the students at their lessons and I heard several musicians whom I feel certain I shall hear again on the concert platforms of the world. As I left the Institute I noticed a bust of Lenin on which someone had placed two fresh daffodils.

* * *

The Central School of Music in Moscow is typical of music schools the world over: a child practising scales on the clarinet at one side of the common room, a 'cellist and a flautist playing different bits of Mozart on the other; through an open door come the sounds of the same four bars being played over and over, the cadenza of Beethoven's Violin Concerto, and, in the centre of this cacophonous wall of noise, two children are playing table tennis, bats and balls flying with rather more enthusiasm than skill.

December 8, 1982, marked the fiftieth anniversary of the school. A concert to commemorate this occasion was held in the large hall of the Tchaikovsky Conservatoire which seats two and a half thousand. This famous music school can count over two hundred competition winners among its students, some of whom choose to stay on after they graduate and become teachers.

For students whose homes are outside Moscow there is a hostel which is subsidized by the State. Board and lodging, music tuition and other facilities are free of charge. The

students are sent thirty three roubles a month by their parents, and good marks in examinations are rewarded with an allowance from the school of an extra twenty seven roubles a month.

I was keenly interested when the director of the school, Valentin Belchenko, invited me to listen to some of the outstanding students. Thirteen year old violinist Lazar Berman, accompanied on the piano by his teacher, Svetlana Besrodnaya, gave a spirited performance of the habanera, the seguidillas and the Bohemian dance from Bizet's opera *Carmen.* Bravo Lazar! Are you one of the future stars in the Soviet musical firmament? It will be interesting to wait and see. As I went into various studios I saw that some of them were decorated with beautiful green plants of all kinds.

In a studio for clarinet students I heard several gifted ten year old boys playing the Weber Concertino and Mozart's Clarinet Concerto in A major, an impressive achievement for such young children. In the Piano Department with its portraits of Mozart and Chopin on the walls I met eleven year old Philip.

"Philip, who are your favourite composers? " I asked.

"Bach and Chopin," he replied.

"And what would you like to play for me now?" I asked.

"I will play a three-part Invention by Bach and an étude by Czerny."

I smiled at this. "When I was a piano student," I told him, "Czerny's études were the bane of my life."

"I believe you," Philip said, "but Czerny is good for the technique, good for the fingers."

He smiled shyly at me and began to play the Bach while his teacher, Yelena Hoven, listened attentively. Her face didn't change when he had finished but it seemed to me that she was pleased with him. She then introduced me to nine year old Alexander Shapkin, another of her most gifted pupils. He played one of Bach's French Suites for me and followed this with the third movement of a Haydn Sonata.

"This is the sonata I will play for the exam," he told me, and I had no doubt whatsoever of his success.

"Would you like me to play something else for you?" he asked.

"I certainly would," I replied, and he gave a graceful per-

formance of the Nocturne from Grieg's *Lyric Suite.*

I was still humming this tuneful piece as I went out into the street. The air had the clean unmistakable smell of imminent snow which would finally materialize that evening, suffusing the streets with silence. But it would disappear the following day not to return.

* * *

I had been in Moscow for ten whole days before I actually saw Red Square, though I'd seen it in the distance as I'd been driving around the city. Ten days! Is this perhaps a record? Most visitors go there on their first day in Moscow, but I had planned a full programme of musical events, so I had to be patient.

One of the most astonishing sights in the Soviet Union, indeed in the whole world, is the Cathedral of the Intercession in Red Square. Ivan the Fourth (The Terrible) ordered a new and splendid church to be built there to celebrate his victory over the Tartars in 1552. The architects and stone-masons whom Ivan chose to direct the work were Postnik and Barma. The cathedral was to be built outside the walls of the Kremlin on the site of an existing church and cemetery where a self-styled "holy" man known as Basil the Blessed was buried.

Basil was an example of the half-crazed, wandering seers with flowing hair and beard who abounded in the Russia of the sixteenth century. They were regarded by the people as miracle workers and prophets. There is controversy among historians as to whether or not Basil the Blessed was actually canonized after the death of Ivan the Terrible, but whether he was or not the cathedral is universally known as St. Basil's.

The church was consecrated in 1560. In Russia both the ecclesiastical and the secular architecture of the sixteenth century displays a deliberate attempt to produce a wholly Russian style free of foreign influences. This was a style which synthesized all the main features in Russian architecture—the onion dome, the *trapeznaya*, which is a gallery with open sides, glazed tiles, vibrant colour, patterns in brick and ornamentation in carved stone, and the *kokoshnik* gable which was so named after the curved and winged

head-dress worn by peasant women. This type of gable evolved as a purely decorative feature but its earliest function had been to give shelter outside the church door.

But knowing this about the Cathedral in Red Square, and having seen it countless times in photographs, hardly prepared me for the shock of surprise at seeing it for the first time—its multiplicity of exotic profiles, curves and angles, its cluster of nine striped and knobbled onion domes crowning chapels of different heights and colours connected by galleries, the sharp thrust of its spire escaping in light. I was overcome with astonishment and could not take my eyes away from it. It is a unique and magical sight. Certainly no photograph could do real justice to its amazingly intricate stone decoration—the result of the blossoming of a technique which had been mastered when wood was the only feasible building material.

In spite of its sheer exuberance of shapes and forms the design has an exotic harmony all its own. The architect had clearly been as at ease in his design as a fish in the Moskva River. The cathedral, although outside the walls of the Kremlin, is organically connected to it and has come to represent the very symbol of Old Russia. St. Basil's is now a branch of the History Museum the main building of which faces it from the opposite side of Red Square. Moscow's History Museum houses a vast collection of exhibits depicting the life of the people of the USSR dating back to the Stone Age.

All around me swirled minked and booted Muscovites and non-Muscovites. American matrons, blue-haired and strident, kept arriving by the coach-load, their cameras clicking. This cathedral is understandably one of the most photographed buildings in the world. A Russian peasant, a big full-moon of a woman, middle fortyish perhaps, a flower-patterned scarf tied under her chin, had a medal pinned to the front of her thick woolen coat. It was the medal of the Soviet Mother denoting that she had produced ten children. She saw me looking at the medal and although her face didn't move she drew herself up a little and squared her shoulders as we passed each other.

It was time for the changing of the guards outside the Lenin Mausoleum and the sight-seers pushed and craned. The clock struck the hour and three soldiers came marching

slowly across the cobbles, their bayonets over their shoulders. The crowd stood respectfully still and silent as the guards changed and immediately afterwards began again its endless movement to and fro.

"Excuse me, comrade, where is the Lenin Mausoleum? " The boy who had stopped me had mistaken me for a Russian because of my big blue-fox hat. I think anyone could look like a Russian in that hat.

"Just over there," I said, pointing and walking towards it, for I wanted to see it myself. The Mausoleum is a long, low, rectangular building of austere design in polished granite and black labradorite. It was designed by the architect Alexei Shchusev and was built in 1930, replacing the wooden building which was made immediately after Lenin's death in 1924. It is situated beside the Kremlin wall between the Spasskaya and Nikolskaya towers. Nearby there are urns set into the Kremlin wall which contain the ashes, among others, of Gorky, Kirov, and the astronauts Gagarin and Komarov. The Mausoleum isn't always open to visitors and it wasn't that day, but when it is open there is always a queue of people outside waiting to file past the embalmed body of the Soviet Union's founder to pay their respects.

As the GUM department store is nearby, I went in to look around. It is the largest multiple store in Moscow and in layout it reminded me somewhat of a modern Welsh market. The principal lanes, which have narrower lanes leading off them, are lined with shops and open stalls. The layout is repeated on the gallery above and the lanes are spanned by wrought-iron bridges which are stengthened with ornamental wrought-iron balustrades. The store was very warm and teeming with shoppers. It seemed that all Moscow was out shopping that day. But I wanted to buy a recording of *May Night*, which I hadn't been able to get in Britain, and I'd promised to buy my husband a Russian hat and a pair of thick-soled leather boots so I decided to walk around for a while. The Soviet Union is a country of stable prices, so stable are they in fact that the price of goods on sale is actually welded onto, or moulded into the product. I bought two beautifully made ballpoint pens in typical Russian painted and lacquered wood. The price, one rouble fifty kopeks each, is actually carved into the pens, *under* the lacquer.

Every kind of consumer goods was on display in the GUM, and there was a crowd in all three of the record shops where I tried, without success, to buy *May Night*. Yes, they'd had it in stock but it was sold out. *May Night* is very popular. No, sorry, they didn't know when the new stocks would arrive. But I bought some records of Russian and Ukrainian folk music, and a Soviet recording of Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake*.

The bookshops were crowded too. The Soviets are great buyers of records and books. A new edition of Tolstoy, Turgenev, Gogol or Gorky and other popular writers will be sold out almost before it is unpacked and placed on the shelves. Books are amazingly cheap in the Soviet Union. So are records. "We want to ensure that literature and learning are within the reach of every pocket," I was told. There are books in every language imaginable, and in great profusion.

Outside one bookshop a group of gypsies in brilliantly theatrical clothes sat casually on the ground eating bread and onions. I was looking for the hat and the boots for my husband when I was overcome by the heat inside the store and I decided to return to the GUM on a day when it was less crowded. I bought some ice cream and thankfully stepped out into Red Square again, where dozens of people with the same idea were eating ice cream out in the fresh air. The ice cream is delicious everywhere in the Soviet Union. The one I was eating had been dipped in chopped nuts and chocolate flakes, and it was made with real cream. No ersatz ingredients are used in the Soviet Union, the people wouldn't tolerate it.

I couldn't resist walking around the cathedral again and I found another angle to photograph and another dome I thought I had missed. The air smelled of spring and was full of murmurous noise. The day had been warm and bright enough to have seemed a day of summer, the sky milky blue and white with streaks of drifting opalescent grey, but now a darker rosy sky was pressing the sunset down behind bare trees and high red walls.

It was time for me to go back to the hotel to change for the evening's concert. I found myself with a bewildering choice of concerts, operas and ballets. Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin* was on at the Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-

Danchenko Theatre, Khachaturyan's ballet *Gayane* was being performed at the Kremlin Palace of Congresses, Verdi's *Otello* was playing at the Bolshoi Theatre, there was a performance at the Obraztsov Puppet Theatre, and there were concerts and recitals and ballets on all over Moscow. I decided on a string and piano concert by the Bolshoi Violin Ensemble at the Tchaikovsky Concert Hall in Mayakovsky Square, a most happy choice because this proved to be one of the most enthralling musical experiences of my life.

Eighteen male and female violinists and one pianist came onto the platform. They were all dressed in plain elegant black. The pianist, Irina Zaitseva, seated herself at the black concert grand piano, which was placed in the centre of the platform, and the violinists arranged themselves in front of it, spaced out in a single line from left to right. They stood straight and still, their violins at their sides, waiting for the audience to settle. This Ensemble did not use chairs; the violinists stood to play with enormous dramatic effect.

Before each piece was played a woman entered to announce the title and composer. We were then treated to one of the most astounding displays of musical virtuosity that I have ever witnessed. All the pieces were chosen to display the impeccable technique and timing of these virtuosi. At no time during this concert was there a single note out of place. Nineteen people played together as one person.

First came a classical group of works by Western composers: Tartini's Variations on a theme of Corelli was followed by Handel's Largo, then we heard Paganini's Caprice and Variations number 24, and "Songs my mother taught me" by Dvořák.

We then heard a group of pieces by Soviet composers: Svetlanov, Prokofiev, Khachaturyan, Kosenko, Khrennikov, Karayev, and Tchulaky. The Ensemble ended the recital proper with a brilliant performance of "Navarra" by Sarasate, himself a virtuoso violinist of world renown. The audience was then treated to a generous number of encores which included a beautiful arrangement of Schubert's "Ave Maria", and the Ensemble sent us home with one of music's most famous insects buzzing in our ears. Seldom can Rimsky-Korsakov's Bumble Bee have taken flight with such swift vitality.

* * *

The following morning I looked out of my window and saw that spring had come at last. For the first time there were no chunks of ice floating in the river and they did not reappear. Eager to breathe in the spring air I tried to open the heavy double French windows only to find them locked and sealed with broad white tape. I called a chambermaid and asked her if she would open the windows for me. She reeled back in horror.

"No, no, it is too cold," she protested in shrill Russian. *"Kholodno."* She crossed her arms over her chest and made an elaborate shiver.

"Please," I insisted, "it is no cold, it's lovely."

Still protesting she called in another chambermaid and quickly made it clear to her comrade that this crazy British woman was obviously trying her best to catch pneumonia. Both talking at once they pleaded with me not to do anything so suicidal as to open the windows at this time of the year. *"Kholodno,"* they admonished, "it is cold."

I decided to try once more. I found the head chambermaid in her room along the corridor and asked her to come to my room where the other two explained the situation. Shaking her head in vast disapproval and muttering sorrowfully at me in Russian, she set the others to taking the tape off the windows while she went to find the key. It took all of fifteen minutes for them to get the windows open and to clear away the piles of flock which were wedged against draughts between both double doors. When the windows were finally opened they backed away from the sweet fresh air as though they were (as Charlotte Brontë would put it) at the very mouth of hell. I was to startle many Soviet people like this with my need of fresh air, although of course I could understand their attitude. They go through harsh winters and love the warmth and closeness of hermetically sealed rooms.

I thanked the chambermaids and stepped onto the balcony into the fragrant air. The river was sparkling in the sunshine and the radio in my room was playing Prokofiev's youthful Piano Concerto number One in D flat major which he composed in 1911 when he was twenty years old. How appropriate this music, I thought, for the first day of

spring—not the first official day but the first *real* day of golden singing-bird spring.

Opposite my balcony, next to the river, there was a small park with a monument to the great Ukrainian poet, Taras Shevchenko. Flocks of pigeons would fly at a given signal from their nests in the various nooks and crannies of the walls of the *Ukraina* and fly into the park, perching in clouds of grey silhouettes on the bare trees. At another given signal, which only they knew, they would suddenly rise into the air again and fly back with a great beating of wings. The chirr and coo of these pigeons was the first sound I heard when I awoke in the mornings for I slept with the French windows open.

As I left my room on my way to breakfast I met a woman I'd become friendly with whose room was just along the corridor from mine. Her name was Anna Sverdlova and she was a Byelorussian in Moscow for a teachers' conference. She spoke no English but she had almost perfect French. We decided to celebrate the first real day of spring by having caviar and champagne for breakfast. There was black and red caviar, and Georgian champagne. After that we had sturgeon with olives and pickled cucumber, an amazing breakfast, but then Moscow is the kind of place which makes one want to do things like that.

After breakfast I visited Moscow's Television Centre. The Soviet Union, Land of Superlatives, has built the tallest television tower in the world—five hundred and forty metres in height. There is a revolving restaurant called "Seventh Heaven" near the top from which one can see a panoramic view of Moscow and the lovely countryside around it. The Television Centre itself is a mammoth building of modern design, elegantly decorated inside with green and flowering plants.

I was welcomed by Yelena Alexandrovna Macheret who is in charge of transmissions of ballet all over the Soviet Union. A video transmission of Shostakovich's ballet *The Golden Age* was going out that evening and I saw it on the monitors. Prokofiev's ballet *Romeo and Juliet* also on video transmission, was planned for the following week. Later in the month there was to be a live presentation of Tchaikovsky's *The Sleeping Beauty* from the stage of the Kirov Theatre in Leningrad. One of the company's leading balle-

rinas, Irina Kolpakova, was to dance the role of Aurora. There were also plans to cover a ballet to be directed by Maya Plisetskaya and choreographed to the music of Bizet's *Carmen.*

I met Alexander Alexeyevich Barannikov who is in charge of video transmissions of opera.

"When we transmit Western opera we sometimes do it in Russian and sometimes in the language of the composer," he told me. "For instance, we recently transmitted Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana* and Leoncavallo's *I Pagliacci* in Italian."

He was amused when I told him that in Britain these two operas, which are by tradition always performed on the same evening, are affectionately known as "Cav and Pag".

"We also recently transmitted Verdi's *Otello* and Puccini's *Madame Butterfly* also in Italian," he said.

"And which Russian operas are most popular with the public?" I asked him.

"Oh, Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin, The Queen of Spades* and *Iolanta,*" he replied, "and of course Mussorgsky's *Boris Godounov* and *Khovanshchina.* Prokofiev's *The Duenna* is also very popular."

Yelena Macheret told me about the immense popularity of Stravinsky's ballets.

"We regularly transmit *The Firebird, The Rite of Spring,* and *Petrushka.* All the Diaghilev ballets are very popular. We are planning a transmission of *Le Spectre de la Rose* next month.

Having seen it many times in Britain I was familiar with this short work danced to Weber's "Invitation to the Dance". Fokine had choreographed in the ballet in 1911 for Niżyński. It was inspired by Théophile Gautier's lovely poem "Le Spectre de la Rose" which begins,

Soulève ta paupière close
Qu'effleure un songe virginal;
Je suis le spectre d'une rose
Que tu portais hier au bal.

In 1832 Hector Berlioz had set this poem, and five others by Théophile Gautier, to form his song cycle, "Les Nuits

d'Eté". I have always thought that the languorously beautiful Berlioz setting of "Spectre" would have provided a more appropriate atmosphere for a romantic ballet than Weber's pleasant but unremarkable waltz tune. But no doubt Fokine considered the Berlioz "Spectre" too short for a ballet.

The Television Centre recently transmitted a ballet called *Isadora* based on the work of Isadora Duncan. The music is by Beethoven, Schubert, Chopin and Scriabin. And there are always requests for transmissions of Khachaturyan's ballet *Spartacus* which is one of the most popular in the Soviet Union. The public can never see enough of it. The Molchanov ballet *The Brest Fortress* is also a great favourite.

After I had been shown around the Television Centre I visited the Glinka Central Museum of Musical Culture. This spacious modern building houses a collection of a hundred and seventy thousand items including two thousand five hundred musical instruments from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries, recordings, photographs, drawings, scores and letters written by many of the great composers such as Beethoven, Glinka, Tchaikovsky, Wagner, Liszt and Prokofiev. Its collection of musical exhibits is said to be the largest in the world. On display are some of the personal belongings of the great composers—books, batons, notebooks, pens and so on.

I saw a bronze bust of Ivan the Terrible and, in a case of operatic costumes, a pair of *lapti* (peasant shoes made of slivers of birch wood). The variety of uses the Russian and Soviet country people have found for birch wood is amazing. Not only do they light their fires with chips of it but they make it into containers for medicines and into buckets for water; they colour and scent their vodka with buds of birch and make birch wood into woven bread baskets and light-weight sledges. As long ago as the eleventh and twelfth centuries the northern Russians lined the walls of their houses with painted birch bark long before they had ever heard of wallpaper. It was both warm and decorative. So the idea that they should wear birch wood on their feet does not seem so outlandish as I first thought.

There was an exhibition dedicated to the art of Feodor Chaliapin and many photographs of the great bass and his colleagues. One photograph showed him with Anna Pavlova. The Glinka Museum was first opened in 1954, one

hundred and fifty years after the birth of Glinka, and was first housed in Novospasskoye which is near Smolensk where Glinka lived. It was recently moved to its present building.

A member of the staff told me that three months before musical archives had been opened. They contain a hundred and fifty Beethoven manuscripts and three of Tchaikovsky's manuscripts—his First Piano Concerto in B flat minor, his Violin Concerto in D major and the Sixth Symphony in B minor.

"It is possible for you to see the manuscripts by special appointment," the staff member told me.

I decided to make an appointment when I returned to Moscow at the end of my tour, because my remaining time in Moscow was at present jam-packed with musical events. In the evenings the silence of the Glinka Museum is broken by music recitals and I hoped to be able to attend some of these.

That evening was to be one of the highlights of my tour, my first visit to the Bolshoi Theatre. In the middle of Marx Avenue there is an enormous statue of Karl Marx carved *in situ* by the sculptor Kerbel from a two hundred ton block of granite. The statue was unveiled during the 22nd Congress of the CPSU. Opposite to the statue stands Moscow's most famous theatre, the Bolshoi (Big) Theatre, which is the oldest in the city. The present building dates from 1825; its famous columns, eight in all, and its statues were added in 1856.

I could hardly have had a better introduction to the Bolshoi. The light rain which had been falling in the afternoon had stopped. It was a lambent evening with pink and white foamy clouds high overhead, and the just-budding leaves on the trees were fresh, flickering and gold-green in the nacreous light. I crossed Revolution Square and had my first view of the Bolshoi's classic white pediment and colonnade.

Inside, the auditorium is palatial and splendid. It has five continuous tiers of cream and gilt boxes and a sixth level gallery. At the far end there is a large state box. The vast stage is curtained in rich heavy gold brocade. The stalls are amazing. There seem to be acres of them, their seats, which are comfortable elegant armchairs, uphol-

stered in red velvet. The auditorium was brilliantly lit by dozens of chandeliers.

That evening there was to be a performance of the ballet *Ivan the Terrible* with music by Prokofiev. I got a programme and as I moved towards my seat I noticed women changing out of their boots into high heeled shoes. A wealth of mirrors around the walls in the foyer and corridors enabled people to comb their hair and tidy themselves after leaving their coats and hats in the cloakroom. The audience was wearing its everyday clothes, but if a woman has been wearing slacks or jeans during the day she usually likes to change into a skirt for an evening performance. It isn't obligatory in the Soviet Union, just good manners.

Reaching my seat in a first-tier box I looked around me. There was an atmosphere of tremendous excitement and expectancy (the Soviets are great lovers of ballet) and I noticed many children among the lively audience. No one was wearing anything special for this performance, no one "dresses up" for the opera or the ballet in the Soviet Union and only occasionally did I see a woman in an ankle-length skirt of the kind I always wear for the theatre in the evening.

The roles of Ivan and Anastasia that evening were danced by Yuri Vladimirov and Natalia Bessmertnova, two of the leading dancers of the Bolshoi company. The Bolshoi Ballet is rightly called the magic symbol of Russian Art but it is more than that, it is a link between past and present, the legendary performers of bygone years inspiring and encouraging the performers of the present day.

In this performance of *Ivan the Terrible* the stark sets, the costumes and dramatic lighting all combined with the music to create an atmosphere of menace and tension. Vladimirov's performance was electrifying. Beneath his red and black costumes each ripple of his body maintained a powerful and effortless discipline. He had the suppleness of a cat. A master of brilliant pirouettes and big leaps, his air of demonic authority made him much more exciting to watch than most male dances outside the Soviet Union. His wonderfully expressive physical presence made an impact which was unforgettable.

In the interval people crowded the spacious buffet and drank wine or fruit juice, ate cakes and caviar, and munched those delicious oblongs of gaily wrapped chocolate which

the Soviets call "Lame Bears". The picture on the wrappers depicts a family of brown bears climbing a tree. I tried them wherever I went in the Soviet Union and I found that they were different in each republic. They were much sweeter, for instance, in Armenia than they are in Moscow which is why I preferred the Moscow "Bears" as I haven't what is called in Britain a "sweet tooth".

I noticed that Soviet audiences are characteristically extremely quiet and attentive. I say this with some feeling because I have visited opera houses, theatres and concert halls in many parts of the world, and audiences are by no means always so well-behaved. On one never-to-be-forgotten Verdi night at the Rome opera house, for instance, I missed nine-tenths of the music because the evening-dressed audience chattered loudly throughout the performance. This doesn't happen in the Soviet Union. The people take their culture as seriously as their politics, and there is no chattering during performances. It would not be considered polite. If they want to chat they go to a restaurant or stay at home with their friends and families.

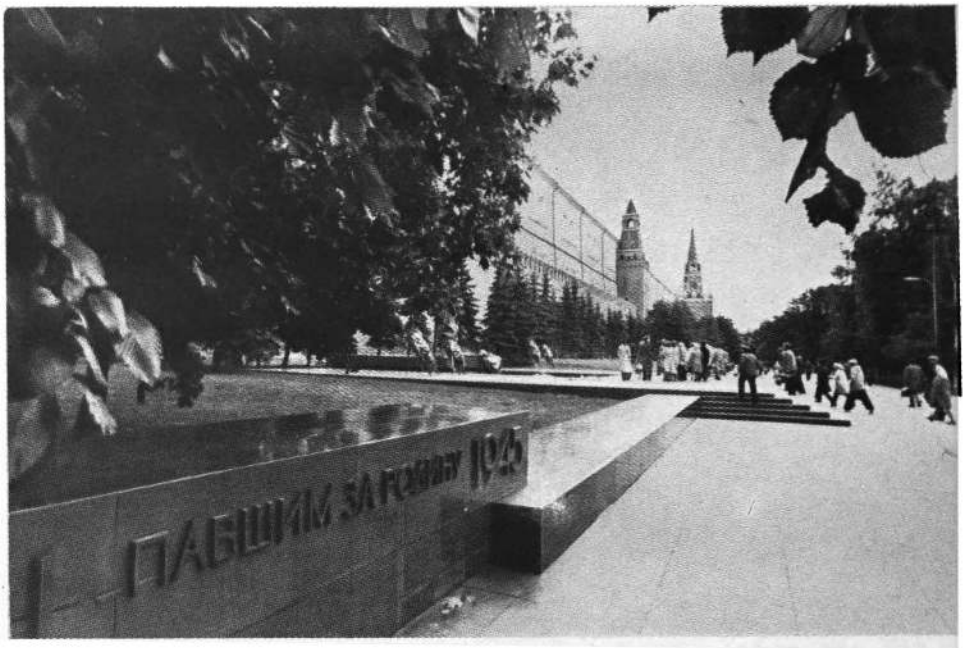
At the end of the performance the audience threw so many flowers onto the stage that the dancers' feet were covered with them. The rhythmic handclapping went on for at least fifteen minutes. Vladimirov and Bessmertnova and the brilliant company took curtain call after curtain call, and still the flowers kept raining down upon the stage. It was one of those occasions when each and every component combined to produce an evening of theatrical magic, crowned by Prokofiev's miraculous music.

I returned to my hotel just in time to catch a performance of Schubert's Ninth Symphony, the Great C Major. It is strange to think that Schubert never heard a performance of this, one of his greatest masterpieces, because it wasn't performed until eleven years after his death in 1828. The first performance took place in Leipzig on the 22nd of March 1839 with the composer Felix Mendelssohn conducting. I mention this because that day was the 22nd of March. Perhaps Soviet Radio is as fond of anniversaries as the BBC.

View of the Moskva River and the *Ukraina* Hotel

View of the Kremlin and Red Square

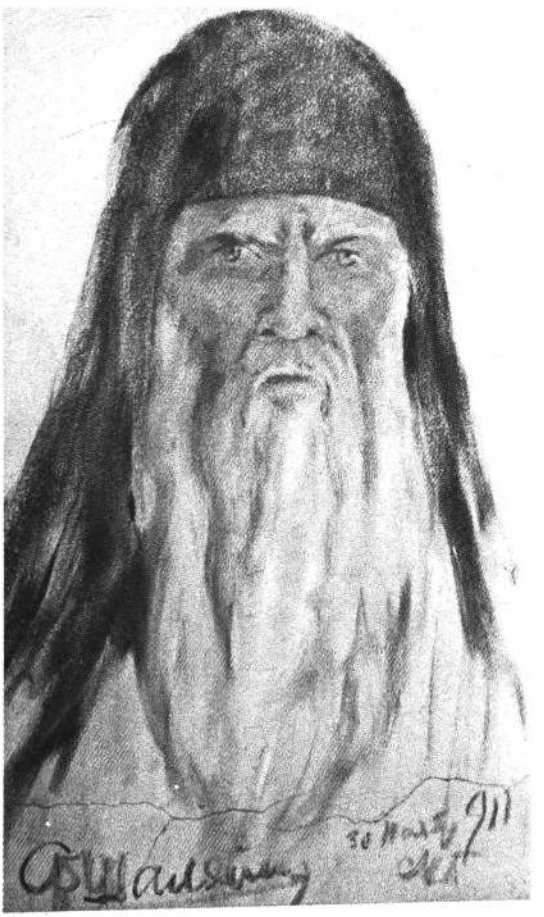
Kalinin Prospekt
in the evening



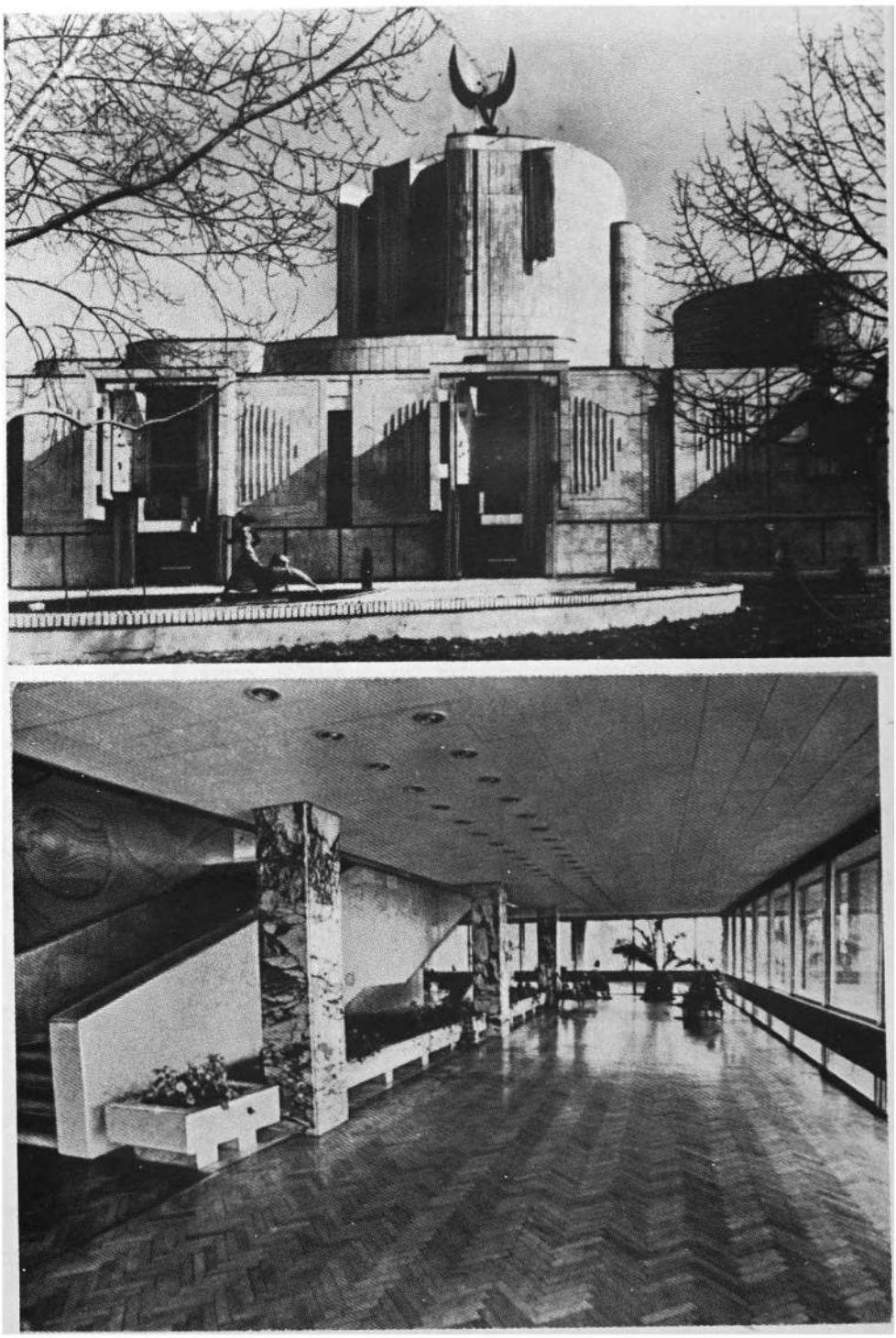
Tomb of the Unknown Soldier
in Alexandrovsky Garden

The traditional arts festival "Russian Winter"
at the Exhibition of Economic Achievements
of the USSR

The animal circus—a favourite of young Muscovites



F.I. Chaliapin as Dosifei (from the opera *Khovanshchina*, 1911). A self-portrait



The State Musical Theatre for Children in Moscow

Natalia Satz—Director
of the Musical Theatre
for Children

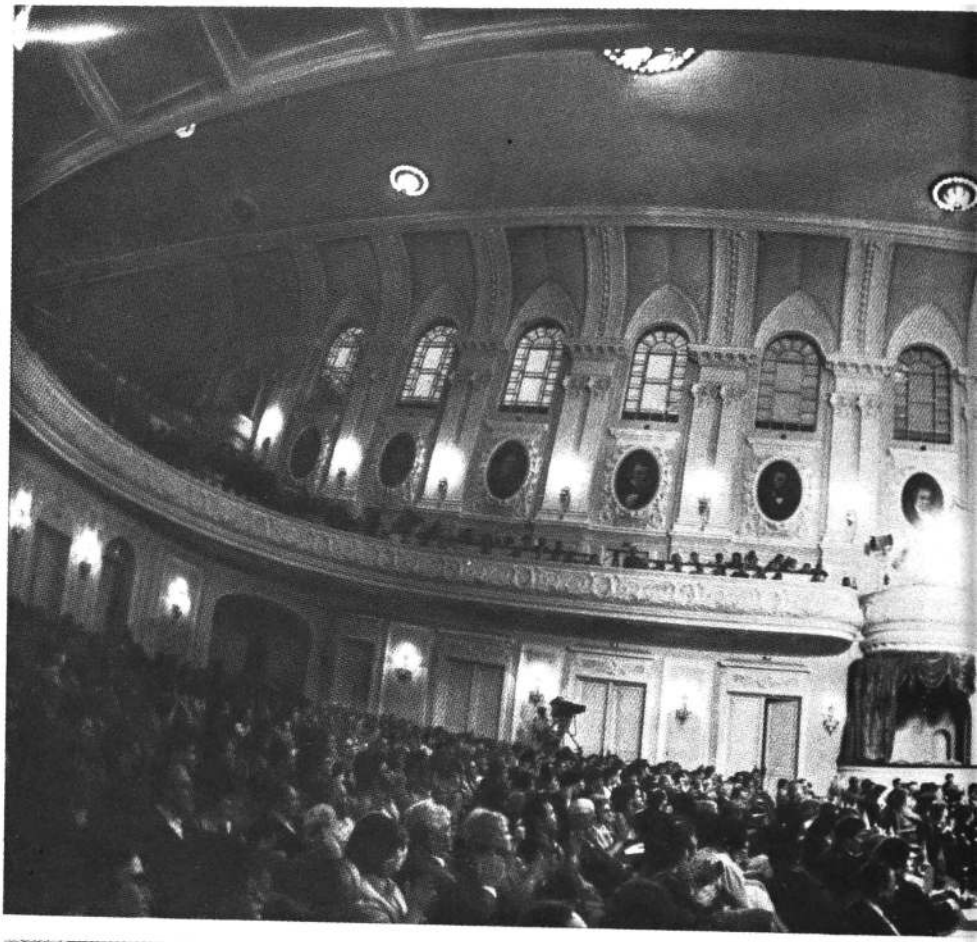
A performance of *Little Red Riding Hood*
at the Musical Theatre for Children

A performance of *Mowgli*
at the Musical Theatre
for Children

A scene from Terentiev's opera *Maximka*

Pianist Peter Donohoe from Great Britain
is welcomed by Soviet music lovers
at the Moscow Conservatoire

Award ceremony for violinists.
At the centre—first prize
winner A. Menezes (Brazil)



Participants in the IV International Ballet Competition at the Bolshoi Theatre (1981)

Contestants at the VII Tchaikovsky International Music Competition perform in the large hall at the Moscow Conservatoire

The entrance to the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow

A.P. Kantor, a teacher at the Gnesin Secondary School
of Music, Yevgeny Kisin, her student,
Vadim Repin, a young violinist from Novosibirsk,
and his teacher Z. Bron at the II International
Music Festival in Moscow
(from left to right)

* * *

"Head up—and down—and turn—and back—and...." The following morning the keep-fit exercises were performed to the tune of Strauss's "Thunder and Lightning Polka" and then the piano played "On the Street Where You Live" from "My Fair Lady". After that it played "Jingle Bells". I stepped out of the French windows and looked down at the river. Two small wooden barges floated past—and two more. There was a morning sound over the city, a buzz, a drone, a kind of bright hum. It was the sound of spring. It had rained a little very early in the morning, and the world was rinsed and cool. I had breakfast out there on the balcony. I had got into the habit of taking food to my room. Why, I thought, sit in a hot and clattering buffet?

I was going again to the Children's Musical Theatre in the afternoon and as I was getting ready I heard a performance on the radio of Brahms' C minor String Quartet opus 51 number 1. It was lovely to be in the Children's Theatre again. As soon as I walked in, the happiness and the sheer enchantment of the place enfolded me once more. I don't think that I could ever go there without that joyous feeling of instantly being whisked away to Fairyland. Tchaikovsky's music filled the air and once again the tide of children rolled around me and onwards towards the auditorium. I paused before the big white cage of birds and lingered once more in the room of lacquered wall panels. I sat down under a large graceful palm tree, and a mother brought her little girl, no more than six or five years old, who spoke to me in breakneck but perfectly understandable English.

"Good day I learn English with my mother she say I am best in family and I come to speak to you because you are from Britain I hope to visit Britain one day and I—I—I," she faltered and looked up at her mother. The mother prinked-up the elaborate white bow on top of her child's light brown hair.

"I welcome...." she prompted in Russian.

The child rattled off again.

"I welcome you to Moscow and to Children's Theatre I hope you enjoy the ballet...." she faltered again.

"I am very pleased," the mother murmured.

"I am very pleased to meet you," the child finished.

"And what is your name? " I asked her.

This was too much for her. She dried up completely and stared shyly at me, her finger in her mouth. She had done very well but enough is enough when you are only five or six years old.

"Svetlana," said her mother.

"Goodbye, Svetlana," I said, "you speak good English," and she did.

The performance, which started at three o'clock, was the ballet *The Blue Bird* after a story by Maurice Maeterlinck with music by Ilya Satz and Mikhail Rauhverger. It was a delightful fairy ballet which everyone adored including me. The special effects were stunning. The two smaller stages flanking the main one were brought into play and the characters danced from stage to stage and at one point the blue bird herself pirouetted right out into the audience and across one of the main aisles over to the other side of the auditorium, a final pirouette and she had vanished only to reappear on stage a few moments later. The children were breathless with delight. There were hundreds of them in the audience and nobody made a sound. They, we, were all in Fairyland, spellbound.

When I left the theatre it was raining a little and the roads looked like broad ribbons of grey silk now that most of the snow had gone.

* * *

For me one of Moscow's most glorious surprises is the Kremlin. *Kreml* is the Russian word for a citadel or fortress but Moscow's Kremlin is much more than that—it is a city within a city, it is the nucleus of the Soviet Capital and the symbol of, first Russian, and now Soviet power. The city of Moscow radiates in concentric circles from it. The Kremlin was founded on Borovitsky Hill. The name comes from the Russian word for "pine forest" the area once having been thickly wooded. This is the oldest part of Moscow. The Kremlin was first mentioned in chronicles in 1147 and its first buildings were of wood.

My first impression was of a profusion of golden onion domes, red brick battlemented walls, and towers upon towers. There are, in fact, twenty towers reinforcing the

Kremlin walls, which in places are nineteen metres high and more than three metres thick. Four of the twenty towers are also gates, these having stood in their present form since the end of the fifteenth century.

The Kremlin is roughly pentagonal in shape, the northern-most point being the Corner Arsenal, also called the Sobakina Tower, which is more than sixty metres high. I walked through an enormous wrought-iron gate into the Alexandrovsky Garden. Nearby is a memorial to the revolutionaries in the form of an obelisk, and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier with its five-pointed starshaped monument. On its granite plinth are inscribed the words, "Your name is unknown, you feat is immortal". On the 8th of May 1967, on the eve of the twenty-second anniversary of the Soviet victory over fascism. Leonid Brezhnev lit an eternal flame on the monument. It burns there as an everlasting tribute to those who died in the Great Patriotic War.

From the garden I could see the Arsenal, a large yellowish structure the building of which was begun in 1702 by Peter the Great but not finished until the end of the century. Today it is an office building.

The most majestic of the Kremlin towers is considered to be the Saviour Tower (Spasskaya Bashnya). When the sixteen year old Michael Romanov, a descendant of Anastasia, wife of Ivan the Terrible, became Tsar in 1613, he started a dynasty which was to rule Russia for three hundred years. Michael's reign lasted for thirty two years (he died in 1645) and during his time the tall Gothic style towers above the Spassky Gate were built. The great clock tower was designed in 1625 by an Englishman, Christopher Galloway, and ornamented by Ogurtsov, a Russian architect. The clock, known as The Chimes, weighs twenty-five tons and occupies the seventh, eighth, and ninth storeys of the tower. During the Revolution of 1917, the clock was shattered by an artillery shell and was restored two years later on Lenin's order. The Kremlin Chimes are heard over Moscow Radio twice a day, at 6 am, and at midnight.

One of the tallest of the Kremlin towers is the Troitskaya (Trinity) which rears more than seventy six metres above the garden. A path leads from the garden to the Kremlin wall where stands the fifty metres high Borovitskaya tower and a gate in the wall. Pedestrians can enter the Kremlin

through one of two gates.

All the churches and cathedrals within the Kremlin have now been converted into museums. In the year of the Moscow Olympics many of them were cleaned, painted and restored. I reached the entrance of the Oruzheinaya Palata—the Armoury—which was built in the middle of the nineteenth century. This is the oldest of the Kremlin museums and houses the crown jewels, thrones, robes and other royal regalia, arms and armour including helmets dating back to the thirteenth century, and objects of gold and silver including many priceless clocks. Two of the buildings in the Kremlin were built during the Soviet era—the House of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet and the Palace of Congresses, which stands near the Troitsky Gate entrance.

I was impressed by the Hall of Facets, a sight to enchant any lover of architectural beauty. It was thus named because its main facade, which overlooks Cathedral Square, is decorated with facets of white stone. Its original use was as a throne and reception room for the entertainment of foreign ambassadors and other dignitaries, and for the celebration of important Russian festivals.

The Hall of Facets, which adjoins the Grand Kremlin Palace, is one of the oldest secular buildings in Moscow having been built from 1487-1491 under the direction of first Mark Fryazin and afterwards of Pietro Solari, who supervised its completion. To enter the Hall of Facets one has to go through the Hall of St. Vladimir in the Grand Kremlin Palace, and through the carved and gilded doors of the Holy Vestibule. Inside, its ornately painted ceiling is groin-vaulted, its four vaults radiating from a single pillar in the centre of the hall. Large tree-tiered chandeliers in wrought-iron hang from the ceiling where the ribs of the vaulting cross. Smaller chandeliers in a simplified version of the same design hang from wrought-iron brackets around the walls. The whole hall shines with golden light reflected from the lavish gilding and the gleaming floor.

Leaving the Hall of Facets I entered the complex of the Grand Kremlin Palace, which is a group of several buildings including the Palace of Congresses, which was built from 1959-1961. The latter is a vast building in the modern style finished with large areas of glass and pure white marble

from the Urals. Congresses of the CPSU and international Union meetings are held here, but the building is of multi-purpose design and is also used for performances by the opera and ballet companies of the Bolshoi Theatre and for music competitions and film performances.

That evening I was going there to see Rimsky-Korsakov's opera, *The Tsar's Bride,* a work which is occasionally broadcast in Britain but hardly ever performed on stage. I was astonished at the sheer size of the crimson and gold auditorium of the Palace of Congresses. It was the largest hall of modern design that I had ever seen, with an enormous stage. It has six thousand seats and when the lights were about to be dimmed for the performance that evening I coudn't see a single one empty. The highly efficient air conditioning system ensured that the auditorium and foyers remained comfortable throughout the performance. The walls of the auditorium are covered with laths of ash wood and the seats are upholstered in crimson cloth. These two features were designed to ensure perfect acoustics, the crimson cloth of the upholstery being sound-absorbent. During the performance it became evident that some of the stage spotlights are actually set into the enormous checkered ceiling.

The Tsar's Bride was first produced in 1899 when Rimsky-Korsakov was fifty-five. It has a complicated story set in 1572 during the reign of Ivan the Terrible. It is a tale of unrequited love, unruly passions in high places, intrigue, poisons and love-potions, set to the colourful, brilliantly orchestrated music which is the hallmark of Rimsky-Korsakov's style. The leading soprano role of Lyubasha was sung on this occasion by Tamara Sinyavskaya. *The Tsar's Bride* is one of Rimsky-Korsakov's most popular operas in the Soviet Union and tickets are always sold out well in advance.

In the interval one can get refreshments on the top floor of the building, up several escalators. There I found a fast-moving queue for "Lame Bears". The pile of them was quickly disappearing, and I just managed to buy almost the last handful.

At the end of the performance I walked out into the cool air. The Kremlin seen at night-time is a truly magical sight with all its buildings floodlit and its five ruby-red

stars glowing against the dark sky. Four of these stars, made of semi-precious stones from the Urals, were put up in 1935 (replacing the double-headed eagles which were the emblem of Tsarist autocracy) on the Spasskaya, Nikolskaya, Troitskaya and Borovitskaya Towers. In 1937 the stars were replaced by new ones made of ruby-red glass which could be lit up at night. A fifth star was added on the Water Tower inside which, in the seventeenth century, a pumping mechanism was installed for drawing water straight up from the Moskva River into the fortress. As I made my way back to my hotel the golden onion domes of the Kremlin glowed darkly and the five red stars radiantly in the Moscow night.

* * *

One can have a lot of fun in Moscow for only four kopeks. This is the fare on the trolley-bus no matter how far you want to go. Moscow has three kinds of overground public transport—the bus, the trolley-bus, and the tram. The bus fare is five kopeks for any distance and the tram fare is only three kopeks for any distance. The buses go maybe a little too fast for sight-seeing and the trams run mostly in the suburbs, so the trolley-bus is a nice compromise.

Most overground public transport vehicles have no conductors. You drop the right fare, if you have it, into a cash box and tear off a ticket. Muscovites have an engaging habit of helping perfect strangers who haven't got the right money. They will make change for you and then insist on paying your fare. The trolley-bus is a good way to see Moscow when your feet start protesting. Moscow is a very large city and unless one is a marathon walker one's feet are going to give up sooner or later and then the trolley-bus comes into its own when one wants to see the sights.

Taxis are cheap if one wants to do it in more style, and sometimes I did prefer it this way. On one of my taxi jaunts around Moscow I went to look at Olympic Village. In 1980 ninety thousand new apartments became available to the people of Moscow. Of these, three thousand four hundred and thirty eight are in the former Olympic Village, which name the neighbourhood still bears. Each apartment is equipped with a large, well-designed kitchen and a balcony or loggia. There are eighteen high-rise blocks in

Olympic Village, their facades decorated in stonework and patterned tiles in bright colours. The Village offers many services to residents including a medical out-patients' clinic, a concert hall, a swimming pool and a restaurant, all within a short walking distance.

Moscow's new residential districts are impressive but, as are all such areas in cities the world over, they are standardized. Rents in the Soviet Union are purely nominal; they never exceed more than five percent of the family's combined income. All Moscow's residential areas are now modern and functional as well as handsome.

* * *

When I went for the first time to the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts in Volkhonka Street I found a sizeable queue outside the gates. Why was it necessary, I wondered, for people to queue outside a building as large as the Pushkin? Surely it could accommodate any number of art lovers. My curiosity got the better of me, besides which I didn't want to waste time standing in a queue when I could be inside the building examining one of the finest art collections in the world.

I discovered that the queue was of people waiting to put their coats in the cloakroom. In the Soviet Union it simply isn't done to wear, or even carry one's overcoat indoors in a public place, and the attendants could only handle a dozen or so people at a time. That was alright then, I was wearing a hat, which one can do with impunity indoors, though politeness suggests that one should not wear one at concerts, operas and ballets. But as the day was mild I wasn't wearing a coat so I was able to walk straight in. The present building of the Pushkin dates from 1895-1912.

In an art collection containing over three thousand paintings and three hundred and fifty thousand drawings, what does one look at first? The Pushkin has one of the world's finest collections of French masters including Gauguin, Pissaro, Poussin, Watteau, David, Delacroix, Monet, Courbet, Cézanne, Degas and Matisse. There is a landscape by the Englishman, John Constable, and works by Utrillo, van Gogh and Picasso. I decided to start with some of these.

That was certainly enough for one day. I could always come to the Pushkin again.

On my way to find them I came upon a copy of Michelangelo's David, the original of which is in the Accademia in Florence. Then I found a whole gallery of Michelangelo copies—the Pietà and the Moses from St. Peter's in Rome, the Bacchus from the Bargello in Florence, some of the figures from the Medici Chapel in San Lorenzo, Florence, and the Rebellious Slave from San Pietro in Vincoli, Rome. I saw several mothers showing the sculptures to their children and I hoped that one day they would visit Italy to see the originals. No matter how finely they may be made, copies of masterpieces can never be the same. The magic of the master's hand isn't there.

I spent some happy hours with the French masters and came away with the impression that in no art gallery in the world had I seen quite so many of Gauguin's finest masterpieces all in one place. I was delighted to see Gauguin's "The Ford", which was painted in 1901, as I had only seen this exquisite work in reproduction. And here was Gauguin's "Te Arii Vahine" (Woman with Mangoes) also sometimes known as "The King's Wife". This was one of Gauguin's own favourites, and he describes it in a letter to Manfried in April 1896 as follows: "I have just made a picture of 130 cm by one metre which I think is even better than anything else to date; a naked queen lying on a green carpet, a servant picking fruit, two old men near the big tree discussing the tree of knowledge; a beach in the background.... I think that in colour I have never before made anything of such a majestic deep sonority. The trees are in flower, the dog is on guard, the two doves on the right are cooing."

Van Gogh is wonderfully represented by one of his finest paintings, "The Red Vinyards", which he painted in 1888-1889. What a pleasure it was to see this glowing masterpiece in the collection!

Volkhonka Street being an easy taxi ride from my hotel, I visited the Pushkin several times, the third time with Anna Sverdlova who shares my passion for fine arts. On my second visit I fell into conversation with a Russian woman who spoke to me in good French. She had her daughter, a girl of about twelve years old, with her.

"Irina and I attend art studios here at the Pushkin,"

she told me. "There are studios for adults and special ones for children, you know. My husband and I have been attending lecture courses here for years—on the history of art. Sometimes there are a thousand people at the lectures."

A thousand people at a lecture on the history of art! In what other country could one see that?

"And Irina belongs to the club here for young art enthusiasts," said the mother. "Tell our friend about it, Irina".

Irina, I found, could also speak good French.

"We did a play about Michelangelo," she told me. "We wrote the script ourselves and we made the sets and the costumes which we designed ourselves."

"Which did you prefer doing? " I asked her, "Writing the script, designing the sets and costumes, or actually making the sets and costumes? "

"I liked writing the script best of all," she replied. "I would like to be a writer when I become an adult."

"There is no better thing to be," I said.

I noticed from posters pinned up near the entrance to the Pushkin that the lecture courses were amazingly cheap to attend. A ticket for a whole series costs only two or three roubles a year.

* * *

In the evening I went again to the Tchaikovsky Conservatoire, this time to hear a performance of Rachmaninov's cantata "The Bells". I noticed as soon as I entered the auditorium that there were arc lights and television cameras all round the platform. The performance was going out live on television. "The Bells" is a work for a Wagner-sized orchestra (two harps, eight cellos), organ, piano, baritone solo, and choir. The stentorian swell of Rachmaninov's music was in startling contrasts to the afternoon's air of quiet contemplation inside the Pushkin.

* * *

"Fasten your coat, comrade, you will be cold."

On two occasions complete strangers came up to me in the street and pointed to my fur jacket which I was wearing slung casually round my shoulders. The weather was too

mild, I thought, to fasten it up.

It is a feature of Soviet life that strangers will advise each other to bundle up more warmly when the wind is keen, and I have seen Muscovites stop each other in the street to take a light from another's burning cigarette. I am told that strangers will even admonish each other for sitting on stone walls and steps in cold weather. That sounds like no more than common sense and consideration for one's fellow beings but people don't do it in Britain, not with strangers anyway. The Soviets are less reserved and I found their concern very endearing.

I saw a food shop and went in to buy something for a picnic. Now that the weather was getting milder, I liked to sit outside on my balcony and write my book whenever I had any time during the day, and I preferred to eat out there too. The delicatessen I had found was piled high with exotic foods, some of them familiar to me from my knowledge of Jewish and Middle Eastern cuisine. I bought some Russian garlic sausage, half a loaf of black bread (yes, in the Soviet Union you can cut a loaf in half if that is all you want), a jar of Hungarian pickled salad with red peppers and onions and green tomatoes, and some fresh tomatoes. In a shop nearby I bought a bottle of keffir. I have always kept a plastic carrier bag or two in my handbag and this habit served me well in the Soviet Union because only the minimum of wrapping paper is given with purchases. The sausage I had bought was wrapped for me and so was the bread, but the jar of salad and the tomatoes went straight into my carrier bag. The Soviets would not understand why we in Britain expect food in tins and jars and bottles to be wrapped, fruit to be wrapped (it is going to be washed or peeled anyway, isn't it?), and things in packets to be put into bags when they are wrapped already. It had not occured to me, before I went to the Soviet Union, quite how much paper we waste in Britain. The Soviets have a dislike of waste of any kind. They often carry their groceries in handy string bags of the kind we used to have in Britain before the ubiquitous plastic carrier bag made its appearance.

While writing up my notes one day and having lunch out there on the balcony, I heard a feast of music on the radio. It started with a bass-baritone singing, in Russian, the Catalogue aria from Mozart's opera *Don Giovanni* and "La

Calumnia", also in Russian, from Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*. Imagine a Russian Leporello and a Russian Don Basilio! This was followed by a symphony orchestra playing Prokofiev, the march from his opera *The Love of Three Oranges* and the ballet suite *Romeo and Juliet*. Then the bass-baritone sang two songs from Tchaikovsky's opus 38-number one, "Don Juan's Serenade" and number three, "At the Ball".

After the Tchaikovsky, I decided to return to the Kremlin to take some photographs of the Belfry of Ivan the Great, the Tsar Bell, and the Tsar Cannon. It is impossible to see everything there is to see in the Kremlin in only one visit. One needs to go many times and I went as often as I could, once with my friend, Anna.

Back to the Tchaikovsky Concert Hall that evening for a percussion concert given by the Udarnikh Instrumental Ensemble with its live-wire director, Mark Pekarsky. The Ensemble has nine percussionists, and trumpets, flutes and viola d'amore. The visual effects devised by Pekarsky and his Ensemble were all part of this stunning concert. The performers were all males and were dressed in plain black polo-necked sweaters and black trousers. The lights in the concert hall were imaginatively used so that we had a Son et Lumière effect with the figures of the performers moving in silhouette against ever-changing irridescences of colours. There were polyphonic sound effects with the trumpeters positioned all around the auditorium and on the balcony.

Apart from the opening work, which was a fanfare by Benjamin Britten, the pieces played before the interval were arrangements of music from the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries. After the interval, the Ensemble played contemporary music from Guatemala. The concert also included a work written by Mark Pekarsky himself. The music was unfamiliar and the hall was by no means full, but the audience clearly enjoyed every minute, as I did, and at the end called for and received several encores.

Not the least of the pleasures for me that evening was the fact that the members of Pekarsky's Ensemble were obviously enjoying themselves enormously, and the concert gathered a momentum which swept the audience along with it. It was daring, it was different, and it was certainly dynamic. It was a performance which gave us an evening of music with-

out playing a melody. The slow handclapping which these intrepid musicians received lasted nearly fifteen minutes. The audience didn't want the concert to end. No flowers were in evidence, but I have a feeling that the next time this Ensemble plays in Moscow the hall will be full.

* * *

I spent the following afternoon at the Palace of Culture of the Moskvich car factory. The Soviet concept of the Palace of Culture is a phenomenon unknown in Britain. Each major factory or other collective has its own Palace of Culture where the workers, their wives, family members and children can spend their leisure in relaxed and pleasant surroundings with every possible facility for education, cultural advancement, recreation and creativity provided. It is subsidized by the relevant Union, in this case the Trade Union of Car Factory Workers.

Svetlana Alexeyevna Rossinskaya welcomed me. She was in charge of the department dealing with cultural matters which is called The Department of Folk Art. We talked in the office of the director, Boris Ivanovich Budrin and I noticed a wooden cutout of Lenin on the wall behind his chair. Svetlana showed me a Diploma which had been awarded to the Palace of Culture by the Young Communist League in 1982.

The Department of Folk Art has two studios with teachers for acting, ballet and other dance forms. There is a music school which has its own symphony orchestra of seventy players, who perform only Russian music. They recently did their first concert tour along the Ob River in Siberia, performing forty concerts in thirty days. The tour was subsidized by the Trade Union Committee and only adults took part. The children, who have their own ensembles, do travel, but only in the Moscow region.

Musical Comedy is very much a feature of the Moskvich Palace of Culture's activities and the children recently performed a musical comedy by Gallina Alexandrova.

"Ballet is also a feature of our work," Svetlana told me. "A Soviet teacher here has trained twenty Japanese children in classical ballet. We also have a class for light music and there are two children's ensembles. They learn piano,

bayan and accordion in the elementary classes."

"How many children are there?" I asked.

"About two hundred and fifty," she replied. "They come here between the ages of five and fifteen. Classes start each year from the first of April."

My hostess showed me round the Palace of Culture. It was a spacious modern building with gleaming polished floors and large windows. Everywhere I looked there were beautifully tended green and flowering plants which go so well with modern style decor. A sports palace is part of the car factory's complex. It has a swimming pool fifty metres long, and a light athletic stadium which was used for basketball and football during the 1980 Moscow Olympics. There is also a children's skating rink where they present ice shows, and there is a vocal ensemble. A concert was to be presented by the children that evening, and I arranged with Svetlana that I would be there.

It was one of the most hugely enjoyable evenings that I spent in Moscow, a joyous romp of fun and laughter and singing and dancing and colour and spectacle. It was a dazzling display of child talent, a non-stop sequence of bright and imaginative routines, some of them gloriously funny. Puppets and animal costumes were used to delightful effect and the children obviously enjoyed every minute of their performance. The audience of proud parents and grandparents, and workers from the factory jam-packed the large auditorium. I couldn't see a vacant seat in the place. Some people were even standing in the aisles. There was a wonderfully joyous atmosphere about the whole evening. Everyone was smiling and happy.

"I'm so glad you enjoyed it," said Svetlana afterwards. "We have another display planned in two days' time, a concert of folk music and dancing. Would you like to come?"

"I'd absolutely love to," I said, "but tomorrow I am flying to the Ukraine."

Chapter 2

MUSICAL UKRAINE

Music lovers who visit the Ukraine gravitate naturally to its capital city, Kiev, which is not only the Republic's main cultural centre but one of the most important centres of culture in the Soviet Union.

An afternoon flight from Moscow's Vnukovo airport and I arrived in Kiev as dusk was falling. As the plane came in to land, I saw deep forests and wooden hillsides, and the city lying on both banks of the Dnieper River which snaked away far into the distance. There were golden onion domes glinting in the lights which were coming on all over the city. When I had last flown over the Soviet Union the land had been white. Now it was turning green.

The Soviet internal air network is highly developed, and the aircraft are big, fast, sturdily built and comfortable. They get you wherever you want to go in the Soviet Union in an amazingly short period of time considering the vast distances involved, and compared with other countries the fares are very cheap.

Victor, a representative of the Republic's Ministry of Culture, and Leonid, from the Muzychna Ukraina (Musical Ukraine) Publishing House, were there to meet me at the airport. They welcomed me to the Ukraine with a bouquet of rosy tulips and, after collecting my luggage, drove me to my hotel in the city centre. They were interested to learn that my grandfather, John Richmond, came from Kiev but was forced to leave with his young wife (my grandmother from Latvia's capital, Riga) because of the Tsar's pogroms against the Jews and other minorities before the Revolution. They settled in the Republic of Ireland where they remained for the rest of their lives and where all their children, two of whom were musicians, were born.

My grandfather was a good linguist who spoke Russian,

Ukrainian and Yiddish and, after leaving Russia, he learned to speak English with only the smallest trace of a Russian accent, and he could even speak some Irish Gaelic! My grandfather had a good ear for phonetics. My grandmother, not quite so gifted at languages, spoke fluent English but with a definite Russian accent.

My other two grandparents came from Yekaterinoslav, now called Dnepropetrovsk. This is now one of the seven major cities in the Ukraine and an important centre of culture. When they were forced to flee from Russia they went to England and settled in the northern city of Newcastle.

Victor and Leonid left me at my hotel where the woman in charge of my floor hastened to find a vase for my tulips and offered tea and biscuits. The first thing I asked was that the windows of my room should be opened. They were locked and the central heating was full on. The woman obliged with a rather puzzled smile. Now why, she was clearly wondering, would anyone want the windows of their room to be opened at that time of the evening?

As I unpacked I listened to the radio. I heard a performance of Prokofiev's Piano Sonata number Six in A. This is the first of Prokofiev's three "War Sonatas" written between 1939 and 1944. It has four movements, the first an energetic fast-moving one of thumping dissonances followed by a dance-like allegretto. The slow movement comes third and the lively finale, with its quiet moments, contains a reminder of the sonata's opening idea.

* * *

I was up bright and early to visit the Ministry of Culture the day after my arrival. The Ministry building was a short walk from my hotel along the Kreshchatic, which is Kiev's main street. The Deputy Minister welcomed me to Kiev, introduced me to some of his colleagues, and told me something about musical life in the Ukraine.

"Every year in Kiev we have Festivals of Soviet Culture," he said. "The 'Kiev Spring' Festival of 1979 was dedicated to the three hundred and twenty-fifth anniversary of the Ukraine's reunion with Russia. In the 'Golden Autumn'

Festival we always place emphasis on classical and chamber music."

"How many music festivals do you hold in the Ukraine each year? " I asked.

"Fifty at least," he replied. "All kinds of music are represented—classical, folk, light and choral."

"And how many professional orchestras are there in the Ukraine? "

"Nine," he said, "the Ukrainian State Philharmonic Society was founded in 1927. We have the Republican State Symphony Orchestra and eight regional symphony orchestras. We also have many smaller ensembles including the Lýsenko Quartet, the Kiev Orchestra of Folk Instruments, the Choir of Bandora players and many others, too many to mention."

"How many Conservatoires have you?" I asked.

"Three—in Kiev, Lvov and Odessa. There is also an Institute of the Arts in Kharkov and a Music Teachers' Training Institute in Donetsk."

There are thirty-three music colleges and music schools in the Ukraine, three specialized ten-year schools, and more than twelve hundred secondary general education music schools where students first learn the rudiments of music and music appreciation. In any one year there are more than seventy thousand concerts performed throughout the Ukraine, about twenty thousand of which are given around the countryside. Musical Ukraine indeed! Every citizen of the Ukraine has access to musical culture. The Sunday matinée concerts are packed with collective farm workers on their day off.

Archeological excavations and historical evidence indicate that Ukrainian music originated in that of the Eastern Slavic tribes whose music reached its highest level during the period of Kiev Rus. Instrumental music was widely played at that time, the evidence of which is to be found in St. Sophia's Cathedral in Kiev. The frescoes of the cathedral depict a musician holding a violin-type instrument, and jesters playing the lute, harp, transverse flute and trumpets. Other popular instruments of that time were the *sopilka* (fife), the *gusli* (psaltery or zither) and the *gudok* (horn). Songs and stories were performed by wandering bards and poets who recited their own works.

The existence of Soviet culture, including of course Ukrainian culture, is unthinkable without close contacts with progressive world culture. The Ukraine has cultural exchanges with no less than fifty countries. At the time of my visit there were two hundred foreign music students studying in ten Ukrainian colleges. In 1982 an opera and ballet company visited Wiesbaden, Germany, taking four operas with them—*Katerina Ismailova* by Shostakovich which was sung in Russian, and *Lucia di Lammermoor* by Donizetti, sung in Italian. The leading role was sung by the soprano Yevgenia Miroshnichenko. They also took the Ukrainian folk opera, *Taras Bulba* by Lýsenko, and Mussorgsky's *Khovanshchina* sung in Russian.

"All levels of musical education and cultural exchanges in the Ukraine are subsidized by the State," the Deputy Minister told me.

The Ukrainian government allocates over seven hundred and fifty million roubles a year for the maintenance of cultural establishments. A considerable part of this sum is spent on the promotion of amateur art activities which are organised at the twenty-six thousand palaces of culture and clubs throughout the Republic. There are twenty thousand amateur choirs, song and dance ensembles, and bandora orchestras. The State's purpose is to discover and encourage talent, even in the remotest village.

Leaving the Ministry of Culture I thought that it was no wonder that the Ukraine is world-famous for being a land of culture. The sheer amount of musical activity is staggering. The light rain of the morning had stopped and the city was bathed in a pale russet sunlight. Kiev looked enchanting and I decided to stroll for a while under the trees. The city is a true garden metropolis and is the greenest city in the Soviet Union. One-third of the urban area is laid out as carefully tended parks and gardens, and the planting of trees, shrubs and flowers continues. Modern Kiev could not fail to impress anyone interested in urban planning and ecology. Architects and town planners take the greatest possible care, when supervising the placement of buildings, not to disturb Kiev's natural environment.

The climate of the Ukraine is warmer than that of Northern Russia, and here in Kiev it was glorious spring with tender green leaf buds on the deciduous trees in contrast

with the darker tones of the evergreens. In the air there was a hint of apricot blossom to come. No one here was wearing a fur coat or hat or heavy boots (or even silly boot!). Trolley-buses, linked together in twos, rattled up and down the tree-lined boulevards, Lada and Moskvich cars flashed past and the city was humming with life and energy.

Kiev, founded in the sixth century, is one of the most ancient of Slav cities. It was once a centre of a powerful European state known as the Kiev Rus—whence comes the name Russia. Kiev is still referred to as "The Mother of Russian Cities", though little is left from the original Kiev Rus period. The ruins of the "Golden Gate" built by Prince Yaroslav the Wise is probably the oldest remaining landmark in the city. This is situated in a square which looks like a small part full of trees and shrubs. The gate was once part of Kiev's fortifications. It was at one time covered with earth, but was then excavated and reinforced in 1832.

After lunch at the hotel a charming guide named Gallina came with a car to take me on a sight-seeing tour of the city. We drove up and down cobbled streets and along many tree-lined roads and I caught whirlwind glimpses of some of Kiev's main centres of culture. Here was the Philharmonic Concert Hall on Kirov Street ("the former Merchants' Hall", said Gallina) and at the beginning of October Revolution Street, which is a steep hill, the October Palace of Culture which was built in 1957. We passed the Tchaikovsky Conservatoire and the Operetta Theatre. Driving down Kirov Street again we passed the Institute for the History of Literature, the Academic Bookshop, the Republican Library, and the Museum of Ukrainian Art, which is built in the style of an ancient Greek temple with a six-columned portico.

As we drove along Kiev's main street, Kreshchatic, I could see why this tree-lined thoroughfare has earned itself the name of the Champs Elysées of the Soviet Union. Driving along Chekist Street we passed the headquarters of the Composers' Union. There were cultural establishments all over the city. Gallina pointed out a beautiful bridge across the Dnieper River. This was built in 1953 to connect the city with the other bank of the river, and is considered to be a masterpiece of the bridge-builder's art.

We came to a large park in memory of those who had

died in the Great Patriotic War. Downhill from the park is the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. We stopped the car at the Botanical Gardens and strolled for a while in the sunshine. Lying on a high hill, the garden has magnificent views of the Dnieper River and the city itself. More than two and a half thousand plants are cultivated here, in open-air flowerbeds and in heated greenhouses.

We drove down to the river, stopped the car again, and walked along the quay and down a sloping road to a riverside park. Here we found Askold's Grave, a rotunda which dates from 1809-1810, where—as the legend goes—a Prince of Kiev was buried in 882. This legend is the subject of the opera I was to see at the Taras Shevchenko Opera and Ballet Theatre that evening. We drove on and stopped at another park where an obelisk in honour of the War dead was guarded by Young Pioneer school children. The children came marching with solemn steps every fifteen minutes to take their turn at the memorial. It is an honour for a child to be chosen for this task. The children were wearing their uniform, the girls in blue skirts, white blouses and socks, and red or black shoes, the boys in black trousers and shoes and white shirts. Some of the children wore blue hats and all of them were wearing red neck-scarfs. One of the boys was carrying a red flag.

After she had shown me the main sights of the city, Gallina left me back at my hotel where I changed into something suitable for the opera.

The first permanent theatre of Russian opera was established in Kiev in 1867. Prior to that the people of Kiev had to rely on performances of touring foreign and home companies. In 1926 the Kiev State Theatre of Opera and Ballet was opened and from that time on became a centre for the development of Ukrainian Soviet musical art theatre. Ten years later, after the first Ten-Day Festival of Ukrainian Art in Moscow, the Kiev Theatre of Opera and Ballet became the first Soviet theatre to be awarded the Order of Lenin. In 1930, on the one hundred and twenty-fifth anniversary of the birth of Taras Shevchenko, the theatre was given the poet's name. In 1967 the theatre celebrated its centennial and was awarded the Order of the Red Banner of Labour.

Built in 1901 and situated in Vladimirskaya Street the

theatre, flanked by trees and flowers, is an impressive building with classical style facades and an unusual rounded roof. It looks particularly attractive at night when floodlit. The handsome auditorium, which has one thousand six hundred and fifty seats, is illuminated by oval lights grouped in threes, and has four tiers of boxes and a finely decorated gilt ceiling designed in concentric circles. The proscenium arch is embellished with a large gilt carving in the centre of which is the emblem of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic—a hammer and sickle on a shield enclosed in the rays of the sun and framed by ears of wheat. The Ukraine is known as the breadbasket of the Soviet Union. At the top of the shield, between the ears of wheat, is a five-pointed star. In the columned foyer, designed in the classical style, there is a white marble bust of Taras Shevchenko opposite a Red Flag. Small incandescent chandeliers are suspended from the ceiling and the walls are hung with portraits of composers and of Ukrainian opera and ballet soloists. Above the bust of Shevchenko is Ilya Repin's portrait of Mussorgsky.

The opera which Victor, Leonid and I saw that evening was *The Ascold's Grave* by Oleg Verstovsky with libretto by M. M. Zagoskin. Three and a half hours in length, this is Ukrainian opera on a grand scale. I found it notable for its lyrical music, its dramatic story and its fine cast of singers. I particularly admired the beautiful costumes and the simple but ingenious stage sets. In the two intervals the Deputy Director of the theatre, Nikolai Zinchenko, invited me with Victor and Leonid to take some refreshment in his sitting room. In the first interval he told us something about the opera repertoire of the theatre.

"We do a lot of Verdi," he said. "The public is very fond of *La Traviata, Rigoletto,* and *Il Trovatore.*"

It didn't surprise me in the least that the people of the Ukraine would like Verdi's three middle-period masterpieces. They would obviously appeal to the passionate Ukrainian temperament.

"In which language are they performed?" I asked him.

"Usually in Ukrainian," he replied.

"That is interesting," I said. "I'd like to hear Verdi performed in Ukrainian. What other Italian operas are in the repertoire?"

"We recently produced Verdi's *Un Ballo in Maschera,* Rossini's *Barber of Siville,* Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor,* and Puccini's *Tosca.*"

"Also in Ukrainian?"

"Yes."

"And French operas?" I asked.

"We perform Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots,* Gounod's *Faust,* Delibes' *Lakmé* and Massenet's *Werther.*"

"Also in Ukrainian?"

"Yes. And I should mention that Gluck's *Orpheus and Euridice* is a particular favourite with the opera-going public in Kiev."

I was interested to hear this. Of the forty-five operas which Gluck wrote, *Orpheus and Euridice,* whose libretto and that of *Alcestis* was written by Calzabigi, and which was first heard in 1762 is the only work of his still to be found in the standard repertoire of European opera houses.

"Which of the Russian operas are performed at this theatre?" I asked.

"Glinka's *Ivan Susanin,* Borodin's *Prince Igor,* Mussorgsky's *Boris Godounov* and *Khovanshchina, The Tsar's Bride* by Rimsky-Korsakov and Tchaikovsky's *The Queen of Spades.*"

"In Russian or Ukrainian?"

"Sometimes the one, sometimes the other."

"And besides *The Ascold's Grave* which of the Ukrainian operas are performed here?"

"Oh, we do *Zaporozhets za Dunayem* by Gulak-Artemovsky, *Natalka Poltavka* by Leontovich, and *Taras Bulba* by Lýsenko."

The libretto of *Taras Bulba* is an adaptation of Nikolai Gogol's tragic story about the old Cossak, Bulba, who kills his own son for betraying the people who were fighting for freedom.

"Any of Shostakovich's operas?" I asked.

"Oh, yes, we produce *Katerina Ismailova.*"

"It is very much admired in Britain," I said.

We drank some mineral water and then it was time for us to return to our box for the second act of *The Ascold's Grave.*

In the second interval we discussed the theatre's ballet repertoire.

"Tchaikovsky's works are regularly performed," said Nikolai Zinchenko, "also Adam's *Gisèlle* and Delibes' *Coppélia.* Those are the perennial favourites. And of course *La Sylphide* which you will see here in a few days' time."

"And which of the Soviet ballets are popular?" I asked.

"Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet* is always sold out weeks ahead and so is his *Zolushka* and Khachaturyan's *Spartacus.*"

"You have a very large repertoire," I said.

"We have," he agreed. "Actually there is too much for me to mention everything." He raised the bottle of mineral water.

"Please drink another glass, it is nearly time for the third act."

The night was fine and cool and I walked back to the hotel from the Opera House. As I reached the *Dnipro* Hotel I saw a group of Soviet sailors chatting together under the trees. I had never seen Soviet sailors before and found their uniform very stylish, especially their hats which had tassels on the back like those on a British barrister's wig. I wanted to get a camera and take a photograph of them but remembered in time that the taking of photographs of the armed forces by foreigners is forbidden in every country in the world including Britain. A pity, I thought. All sailors' uniforms are attractive but these were exceptionally so.

* * *

The Tchaikovsky State Conservatoire of Kiev, founded in 1913, is one of the oldest in the Soviet Union. The Ukraine has two other Conservatoires, in Lvov and Odessa. The Kiev Conservatoire has been awarded the Order of Lenin and two Honorary Diplomas of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic for its achievements in the development of musical education and culture.

Many world-famous musicians have been associated with the Conservatoire, notably the composer Reinhold Moritzovich Glière, who was born in Kiev in 1875 and died in Moscow in 1956 at the age of eighty-one. He studied at the Moscow Conservatoire and was a student of Sergei Taneyev who succeeded Tchaikovsky as professor of counterpoint and composition. Glière also studied under Mikhail Ippoli-

tov-Ivanov who was a pupil of Rimsky-Korsakov at the St. Petersburg Conservatoire. Ippolitov-Ivanov himself later became a professor and director of the Conservatoire of Moscow. Both Vladimir Pukhalsky the pianist and conductor and Glière were rectors of the Kiev Conservatoire, and among its early professors were the composers Lev Revutsky and Boris Lyatoshinsky.

The Deputy Director of the Conservatoire, Ludmilla Tsverko, welcomed me and introduced me to some of her colleagues on the Board—Mikhail Shellest, director of the Orchestral Faculty, Yevgeny Nosarev, deputy director of the Faculty of Vocal Music and Conducting, and Vitaly Sechkin, professor emeritus of Piano.

The Conservatoire has six departments—the history and theory of music, piano, composition, orchestral music (with a department for folk instruments), vocal music (with departments for opera, art song and musical comedy), and the conductors' department (with a separate department for the conducting of choirs).

Our discussion first centred mainly on Ukrainian opera. In the nineteenth century musical life in the Ukraine was closely associated with the theatre and under this influence the first Ukrainian opera *Zaporozhets za Dunayem* (Cossacks Beyond the Danube) was written by Simeon Gulak-Artemovsky. The composer, who lived from 1813 to 1873, was a student of Glinka and a friend of the Ukrainian poet, Taras Shevchenko. Gulak-Artemovsky was also an opera singer—a fine bass trained in Italy—and it was he who first sang the leading bass role in *Zaporozhets*. He was also an accomplished actor. His opera is a lyrical-historical work in three acts depicting the everyday life of the people, and it is considered a masterpiece of Ukrainian music. It has been immensely popular in the Ukraine and beyond for well over a century. In Kiev alone it has been performed on stage more than a thousand times.

Our discussion turned to Ukrainian classical music, the founder of which was Nikolai Lýsenko (1842-1912) who is renowned not only for his operas but for his instrumental works, songs, choruses and romances. Contemporary with him, and following him, were the composers M.M. Kalachevsky, V.I. Sokalsky and M.M. Arkas.

After the October Revolution of 1917 a new music

began to be created by progressive Ukrainian composers whose work aimed to reflect the ideals of the new socialist society. These composers included H. Veryovka, P. Kozitsky, M. Verikivsky, V. Kosenko and L. Revutsky, some of whose music I was to hear during my stay. The music composed during the Great Patriotic War again reflected the struggle and heroism of a progressive society in combat with fascist power. The music dating from this period includes B. Lyatoshinsky's Ukrainian Quintet, I. Vilensky's "Song about the Ukraine", and A. Shtogarenko's "My Ukraine". Andrey Shtogarenko was one of the composers I was to meet in Kiev a few days after my arrival.

In the post-war years many symphonic works made their appearance. This period also marks the upsurge of Ukrainian song, choral music, opera, and music written for children. Prominent in this last genre are L. Revutsky, T. Shutenko and A. Shtogarenko. In the realm of ballet music one of the most prominent composers is V. Kireyko whom I was also to meet.

The Taras Shevchenko Opera and Ballet Theatre of the city of Kiev, although founded in 1867, became the real centre of the Republic's musical culture only after the Great October Revolution. Among many others, the work of L. Rudenko is particularly associated with this theatre.

Ludmilla Tsverko told me about the work of the Conservatoire and of the Youth Opera Theatre which was founded in 1941.

"We have a folk music department," she said, "where we teach the national folk instruments of the Ukraine—bandora, domra, balalaika, bayan, guitar and cymbalos."

"There are three hundred and sixty students in the orchestral department," Mikhail Shellest told me, "and we have two symphony orchestras, a chamber ensemble, and a wind band."

All musical education in the Ukraine is subsidized by the State. Everything, including medical care, is free of charge. Ukrainian musical life is developing, as always, in close contact with the life of the people and with the musical art of the entire Soviet Union. When students graduate they are guaranteed employment and a flat.

"We have an opera studio," said Ludmilla Tsverko, "and we also have a professional theatre. There is also a special

school for outstanding students from all parts of the Ukraine. They study with us from the age of five to the age of eleven. We have a museum devoted to the work of Lýsenko, a reading hall and a library with three hundred and thirty four thousand books and manuscripts."

After we had finished our discussion some of the outstanding students of the Conservatoire presented an impromptu concert for me, there in the deputy director's room. First Julia Weissman (violin) and Leonid Pargoni (guitar), both third year students, played Paganini's Sonata in B flat minor. Tatiana Pavluk (soprano) a third year student, sang a Ukrainian folk song, "I would go to the Mountain" arranged by Lýsenko, and was accompanied on the piano by her teacher, Georgi Pollack. She then sang two romances by the Moldavian composer, Kiktar, with words by Pushkin— "Young Man in Tears" and "Play, Adèle". The music of these two songs laid much emphasis on modern harmonies.

Lilia Zayarnaya, a fourth year piano student, played a lullaby by the Ukrainian composer, Kossenko, and a prelude by Rachmaninov. Tatiana Kulakovska, another fourth year piano student, accompanied soprano Tamara Kulina in Liù's aria, "Tanto amore segreto" from Act Three of Puccini's opera *Turandot.* She sang it in Ukrainian. Raisa Lesnichaya and Natalia Kovalyetskaya, two fourth year students of the bandora, played a Ukrainian song "My Cabin" by Pashkevich. Both girls were dressed in Ukrainian national costumes with gaily patterned check skirts, white flowered blouses, dark blue aprons and red leather boots.

The bandora is a large, wire-stringed wooden instrument of great antiquity. In appearance it is something like a large lute although more circular in outline, and with a flat back like a guitar. It has between 47-68 strings and is played held upright on the knee, the strings being plucked with the fingers.

Alexander Barabas, a third year student, sang songs by Tchaikovsky and Glière in a fine bass-baritone. He followed these with the Ukrainian folk song "I walked in the Garden".

"This impromptu concert has been an unexpected pleasure," I said, "I am charmed."

"You are very welcome," said Ludmilla Tsverko. "Please come again to the Conservatoire."

* * *

That evening I met Professor Arseny Kotlyarevsky who had invited me, with Victor and Leonid, to a concert at the Republican House of Organ and Chamber Music, of which he is Artistic Director. He also holds the title of Honoured Artist of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic and heads the class of organ music at the Kiev Conservatoire. The House of Organ and Chamber Music, which is in Chervonoarmeyskaya Street, was built in 1909 and re-opened as a concert hall at the beginning of 1981—a notable event in the artistic life of the Ukraine's capital city. Its conversion to a concert hall was designed by architect V.V. Gorodetsky. Before then, concerts of organ music were held in the Opera Studio of the Conservatoire whose auditorium, not having been designed for concerts of this kind, was unable to display to the fullest extent the enormous range of sonorities of which the organ is capable.

The decoration of the House of Organ is particularly fine. Tall pillars, ceiling vaults and sparkling chandeliers make the interior a place of grace and repose with a distinctly classical atmosphere. The beautiful stained glass windows, which are exact replicas of ancient designs, were made by glass experts from Lvov. The Gothic style wooden seats are upholstered in red velvet and decorated with carved trefoils. The floors are made of highly polished wooden parquet. Specialists of the Dniprotsivilprombud Institute undertook the task of modernizing the building and adapting it to a concert hall, creating the best possible acoustic conditions. The outside of the building is equally attractive and the roof tiles are exact copies of antique ones.

In addition to holding recitals of organ music, the House of Organ is used for song recitals, solo instrumental concerts, chamber orchestral concerts, choirs, and small chamber ensembles. One of the more notable recent performances was one given by the Borodin String Quartet of Moscow.

Professor Kotlyarevsky invited us into his study and told us something about the centrepiece of his domain, the organ itself. The original small organ in this hall was destroyed during the Great Patriotic War.

"The new organ was especially made for Kiev by the Czechoslovakian firm of Riger-Kloss in 1980," said the

professor. "It has three thousand, nine hundred and sixty metal and wooden pipes divided into fifty-five ranks, and it has a range of nine and a half octaves and three keyboards."

We discussed the composers of what is known as the Golden Age of organ music, the seventeenth century and the first half of the eighteenth century.

"One of the most brilliant figures in European organ culture was Jan Pieterzoon Sweelinck from the Netherlands," said the professor. "He influenced the whole organ-playing art of Northern Europe, including the great Sebastian Bach himself, although he died sixty-four years before Bach was born."

"Indeed," I said, "and in the seventeenth century Dietrich Buxtehude made Lübek a place of pilgrimage for lovers of organ art. The young Bach is said to have walked two hundred miles to hear him play."

"Johann Pachelbel of Nuremberg was another whose music influenced Bach," said the professor. "Like Sweelinck and Buxtehude, Pachelbel helped to develop the choral prelude which Bach perfected."

"It is interesting," I said, "that European organ music developed in close connection with the life of the church, whereas Russian organ music was of a purely secular nature even as early as the ninth and tenth centuries."

"Yes," said the professor, "the organ was used at all major court festivities at the Moscow Kremlin's Faceted Hall, and it was used at weddings and receptions and performances of comedy. The one place where it wasn't used was in church. No orthodox church in Russia had an organ because there was great objection to instrumental music in church. In Russia the organ never lost its purely secular nature."

We agreed that the result of this has been that unaccompanied singing and choral composition in Russia has been carried to a polished perfection. Our discussion continued until it was time for the performance. When we entered the concert hall I noticed that nearly every seat was occupied. Kiev obviously has many people who are connoiseurs of organ music.

The organist Valery Mikhalyuk, who is also a harpsichord player, first played a sonata by Julius Reubke, a

composer who died at the age of twenty-four. He followed this with the Third Rhapsodie by Camille Saint-Saëns, the French composer who was born in Paris in 1835 and who died in Algiers in 1921. Saint-Saëns' first successes were as an organist and for twenty years he was organist of the Madeleine. The first half of the concert ended with the Scherzo by Marco Enrico Bossi who was born near Lake Garda in 1861 and who died on the Atlantic in 1925 when returning from an American recital tour.

During the interval we went down to the basement where there is a refreshment room, a foyer, and the cloak-rooms. After the interval the soloist played the Second Sonata by Max Reger, the Bavarian composer who was born in 1873 and died at Leipzig in 1916. The concert ended with the Gothic Suite's by L. Belman.

* * *

Nikolai Berveki, Head of the Cultural Department, welcomed me to the House of Actors. He introduced me to Pyotr Terpelyuk, Honoured Artist of the Ukrainian S.S.R., the conductor of the Kiev Orchestra of Folk Instruments.

"Folk art expresses the life of the people," said Pyotr Terpelyuk.

"Each village in the Ukraine has its own special combination of instruments and therefore each orchestra has its own individual character. So our orchestra of folk instruments is unique."

"Folk dance and songs of the Ukraine, Russia and Byelorussia influenced the development of Ukrainian instrumental music. In our Republic the small folk ensemble is typical," Nikolai Berveki told me. "And in our orchestra we use *kobzas,* bandoras, cymbalos, lyres, Italian fiddles, and bagpipes from Volinka in Yugoslavia."

I learned that there are more than eighty folk ensembles in the Ukraine and that in 1969 the Folk Music and Choir Society established the Society of Folk Instruments. In April 1970 they gave their first concert, which was conducted by Yakov Orlov. Among many other ventures, Orlov transposed the *gopak* for the orchestra. For twelve years he travelled in the Ukraine, Moldavia, Trans-Caucasia and Byelorussia, and worked with some outstanding artists includ-

ing Dmitri Gnatyuk, Nikolai Kondratyuk and Yevgenia Miroshnichenko.

"Come and hear our boys' choir," invited Nikolai Berveki, "they are rehearsing now."

We went into a studio where, directed by their choirmaster, Vladimir Mishko, twenty-four small boys, sopranos and altos, performed music by Palestrina, Orlando Gibbons and Lasso for me in the Ukrainian language. Then they sang the Ukrainian folk song, "From the Edge of the Forest".

"That was a surprise for you," smiled Pyotr Terpelyuk, "and we have another. The orchestra has arranged an impromptu concert of Ukrainian folk music for you. They are all waiting in the concert hall."

When I entered the concert hall I was charmed to see that all the musicians were wearing Ukrainian national costume. The women were in red skirts and white blouses and black embroidered tunics, with beribboned bands of flowers on their heads. Some of the men were in green trousers and some were in red, with white shirts and embroidered tunics. Everyone was wearing red leather boots.

The orchestra has fifty-eight musicians who play violin, double bass, 'cello, flute, pipe, clarinet, trembita, cossack's pipes, bandora, *kobza*, percussion-dulcimer, drum, tambourine (known in the Ukraine as a *bubbin*), triangle, timpani, lyre, *surka* (bull's horn) and cymbalos. First they played their conductor, Yakov Orlov's arrangement of a *gopak*, which is a typical Ukrainian dance, then they played "Troika", a piece featuring sleigh bells. This was followed by the "March of the Zaporozhtsy". The baritone, Vladimir Yessipok then sang a folk song, "The Moon above the Hill" after which there were several folk melodies for the cymbalo soloist. This delightful impromptu concert ended with a selection of folk songs and dances from all over the Ukraine and reflected the comprehensive range of the orchestra's repertoire; the music was ardent and lighthearted, solemn, heroic, mournful and animated.

The orchestra's founder and permanent artistic director, Yakov Orlov, holds the title of People's Artist of the Ukrainian S.S.R. The orchestra itself is based on the traditional Ukrainian group known as "troisky muzyky" which comprises strings, woodwind and percussion, a combination which produces great richness of timbre and orchestral

colour. It is known all over the Ukraine, in the hills and valleys, in the cities, towns and villages, bringing folk art back to the people from whose ancestors it sprang.

The rich folk culture of Russia was rediscovered in the nineteenth century by the great artists of the time. This culture reflects the character of the people, their profound love of music, their hospitality and capacity for friendship, their strength, love of laughter, stoicism, streak of melancholy, capacity for hard work, physical endurance, patience, and romanticism.

When the Nazis completely devastated the Ukraine before retreating from it during the Great Patriotic War, the folk music which resulted from this mindless destruction reflected the courage and heroism of a people who would never bow down to the oppressor. Their songs reflect the hope of rebuilding their shattered lives, of a better life in the future. Kiev, which was left as piles of smouldering rubble, rose again like a phoenix and earned the title of Hero-City.

* * *

In the Soviet Union the children go to school only in the morning. The State therefore arranges various educational and recreational facilities which will occupy the children in the afternoons until their parents arrive home from work. Most women prefer to go back to their jobs once their children are old enough to start school. One of the most interesting places I saw which had been especially designed for children was a remarkable library where they can go to increase their knowledge, learn to appreciate all the high arts, relax, play, and have something to eat—all in the pleasantest possible atmosphere and surroundings.

The Children's Library is on the outskirts of Kiev, but when I arrived there I had the impression of being in a clearing in the forest. Dark conifer trees encircled the modern building complex with its adjoining garden. The Library's director, H. Kobzarenko, showed me round the building. The first thing I saw when I entered was an ornamental fountain in ceramics designed in a shallow rectangular pool which occupied most of the entrance hall. It was a fairy-

like design of total originality, delicately coloured, a thing to delight any child.

I went into a large pleasant room lined with books. There were tables at which children sat, deep in their reading. I saw many British classics which had been translated into Russian, among them *The Jungle Book, The Wind in the Willows,* and *Treasure Island,* in fact there were many of the works of Robert Louis Stevenson. There was Kingsley's *The Water Babies* and the works of Dickens, the Brontës, and many others, all the kind of books which interest children. I looked over one child's shoulder and found he was reading *David Copperfield.* Another was reading *Pickwick Papers.* I asked if many of the children liked Dickens and was told that he is one of the most popular British authors. Shakespeare is very popular with the older children, over the age of about fourteen. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is everybody's favourite and I remember that at that age it was mine too, and I still count it among my favourite Shakespeare plays.

H. Kobzarenko showed me how the library staff help the children to get the most out of their reading.

"If a child shows a particular interest in any one subject we encourage that interest and see that the child has access to every book available on that subject. The individual abilities and preferences of each child are carefully nurtured and that gives us, and their school teachers, an idea of the child's possible future trade or profession. The individuality of the child is of paramount importance."

The Library's music room was of particular interest. Here, groups of children sit together in a number of high-backed, red-upholstered circular seating areas especially designed for them. Each child wears headphones so that he or she can listen to their favourite music. One little boy offered me his headphones and when I put them on I found that he was listening to Wagner's *The Flying Dutchman.* A piano score of the opera was open on a small table in front of where he was sitting. The little girl next to him then offered me her headphones and I found that she was listening to Tchaikovsky's "Hamlet" overture.

Wooden shelving lines the walls of the music room and here I saw every conceivable kind of music book—biographies of all the composers, from both East and West, sto-

ries about them and their music, books on the elements of music and music appreciation. There were also dozens of symphonic, chamber, and operatic scores, and on another wall was the Library's large collection of records which included every kind of Russian, Soviet, and Western music. The children look in the catalogues and choose what they would like to hear. A staff member puts the records on because some of the children are too young to be able, safely, to handle easily-damaged records and electronic equipment. The room has a television set for those who like to watch.

There is a large, four-sided ornamental pillar in the centre of the room, obviously by the same hand that designed the fountain. This floor-to-ceiling pillar is decorated with ceramics depicting men and women playing all kinds of musical instruments. A four-sided panel near the bottom of the pillar depicts birds and leaves and flowers glowing brightly against the green colour of the carpet. Everywhere in the room I could see portraits and photographs of the world's greatest composers among whom were some famous Ukrainians.

Leaving the music room I next saw a lecture theatre where the children can go to hear talks (with film slides) on music, music appreciation and literature. The seats are arranged in step-like tiers and are thickly upholstered for comfort and warmth.

Soviet children love puppets, both to watch and to play with, and they are often incorporated into school curricula being considered an important and valuable learning aid, especially for the younger children. So I wasn't at all surprised to discover that the Children's Library has its own puppet theatre, which is a great favourite with everyone. As I entered the small and cosy theatre, a puppet popped over the top of the stage and said in remarkably good English,

"Dear Sonya Richmond, we welcome you to the Kiev Children's Library and to our puppet theatre. We hope you have a very happy day here and we would like to present you with a token of our esteem."

The puppet disappeared and a boy of about eight years old stepped out from behind the stage and presented me with a red carnation, the bright symbol of the Socialist

Revolution, enclosed in a tube of cellophane.

"Your English is very good," I said. "How long have you been studying it?"

"Two years," he replied shyly.

"And do you study any other foreign languages?"

"Yes, I also study French."

I was very impressed with this child. He is already a linguist.

Everywhere in the Children's Library I saw books by Western European writers—Aldous Huxley, D'Annunzio, Dante, Victor Hugo, Wells, Scott, Molière, Rolland, Gide, George Sand, Wilde, Joyce, Hemingway—the list is endless. All these books were both in Russian and in the author's language. Some of them had been translated into Ukrainian.

In the next room there were about thirty children all seated at desks. They had been having a discussion about literature, presided over by a member of the library staff. I had collected a small group of people around me as I walked around the library, and the children rose to their feet as we all entered. H. C. Kobzarenko bade the children be seated and then introduced me to them and asked if anyone had any questions for me. There was a shy silence for a few moments and then a girl put up her hand and asked me in English,

"Where do you live?"

"On the South coast of Wales, in Britain," I replied.

After that the questions, all in very good English, came from all over the room.

"Is this your first visit to our country?"

"Yes, it is," I said, "but I hope it won't be the last."

"What is your work?"

"I am an author," I replied.

"What are you writing now?"

"A book about musical life in the Soviet Union."

"Do you like your work?"

"Yes, very much."

"Do you read the literature of our country?"

"Oh, yes of course," I said.

"Which of our writers do you like?"

"Very many—Tolstoy, Chekhov, Gorky, Turgenev, Gogol, Sholokhov," I replied. "There are too many to mention."

"Do you like Shakespeare?"

"Yes, very much." I smiled. "We are very proud of him in Britain."

"Which of his plays do you like best?"

I thought for a moment and then replied, "*Macbeth, King Lear,* and *Richard the Second*, but I like all of Shakespeare."

The questions continued until the children had run out of things to ask me.

"It has been lovely meeting you all," I said. "Goodbye." I blew them a kiss as I left the room. Soviet children are delightful. These here in the library were on their very best behaviour and had obviously been told to be very good and extra quiet while the visiting foreign author was in the building, but even so their lovely little personalities shone through all that they did.

After I had been shown all round the Library we all went to the canteen where refreshments were laid out for us.

"This is food for young stomachs," said H. C. Kobzarenko. "We thought you would like to try some of the things the children like."

"Indeed I would," I said. On the table were fruit tarts topped with meringue, fresh cold milk, orange juice, and a bowl of apples and oranges. It was a pleasant end to a most interesting afternoon.

"Ipsa multarum artium scientia, etiam aliud agentes, nos ornat"—"The knowledge of many arts is valuable to us even though we follow some other calling."

(Tacitus)

* * *

Leaving the others at the Library, Leonid and I got a taxi and drove back into the centre of Kiev. On our route lay the site of the infamous Babi Yar, and we stopped to pay tribute. Babi Yar means "a woman's ravine". On the 29th and 30th of September 1941, thirty three thousand, seven hundred and eleven Jewish men, women and children were massacred by the Nazis. The local German commandant gave the order that the entire Jewish population left alive in Kiev should be taken to Babi Yar and thrown, before or after being shot, into the ravine, and that bulldoz-

ers should fill in the entire area with earth. Thus took place the most horrifying army-organised mass murder of civilians in the history of the modern world. In the space of forty-eight hours a considerable part of the Jewish population of Kiev was wiped out.

The ground at Babi Yar is level now and a monument to the dead stands in a park area. The monument is harrowingly realistic and depicts men, women and children fighting for air, for life, as the earth is bulldozed over them. I was holding the red carnation which the young puppeteer had given me, and I laid it at the base of the monument, too appalled even to think what it must have been like to suffer such a death. Someone had already laid some daffodils there. I took some photographs and went away. As I left Babi Yar I saw an elderly woman standing near the monument weeping silently, a handkerchief pressed to her face. Had she lost those she loved in this terrible place? Were the daffodils hers? I wondered if she were Jewish and thought she probably was. We looked at each other as I passed her, but we didn't speak. What was there to say?

* * *

I had arranged to meet Konstantin Silantiev, manager of the Ukrconcert Folk-Ethnographic Ensemble. He holds the titles of People's Artist of the USSR, Honoured Artist of the RSFSR, and is Art Prize Laureate of the GDR. When I arrived he introduced me to his colleagues Victor Lysuk, director of the Ensemble, Nikolai Buravkin the arranger, and Anatoly Saprunov the ballet master who is an Honoured Artist of the Ukrainian S.S.R. The Ensemble was inaugurated in 1982 to display the best Ukrainian folk dances and poetry to the public.

I saw a rehearsal of part of their first production, which was based on the seasons of the year, beginning with spring. Some of the dancers carried water jugs to a well to signify the beginning of life, other dancers were dressed as birds and animals. Then there was a scene depicting the holiday of midsummer, July 26, when love and marriage is celebrated. This is based on old Kiev traditions.

The dancers were all graduates of the Kiev Conservatoire's special studies for folk art. The dances and mimes

enacted seasonal, ritual, and everyday life, joy and grief, anticipation and regret, life and death. The national uniqueness of Ukrainian folklore, customs and traditions were magically transformed into music and song. Ukrainians, and indeed all peoples of the land which is now the Soviet Union, have always been profoundly musical and have, from earliest times, recorded their history and their lives in terms of singing, dancing and mime. They had their ancient round dances (*khorovod*), their songs of village heroes, harvest songs, soldiers' stories of high adventure, fortune-telling songs, laments, their songs of love and loss, of hope, of work, and of play.

The Ensemble is preparing a new programme based on contemporary folklore which is very much alive in the Ukrainian Countryside. There is emphasis on local traditions, and close attention is paid to dialects, costumes, and styles of folk singing. The new programme will feature some of the Ukraine's winter rituals, traditional singing and folk handicrafts. It will also present the life of a shepherd and his family from the mountain region.

"Our audience is eighty percent young people," said Victor Lysuk. "We aim to show to our younger generation the long and fruitful traditions of our Ukrainian culture. We like to hear of their attitudes and their opinions of our work. People of every nation in the world find it necessary to go to the roots of their traditions—it satisfies some deep need in them. We all need to establish our own identity."

"We aim for total authenticity in our work," said Nikolai Buravkin. "For instance, we made a recording for the theatre of women gathering crops in the fields. They were singing as they worked and we incorporated that into our programme."

"As artists we have a great responsibility to the people to bring them into contact with their own cultural heritage," said Anatoly Saprunov. "We live with the interests of the people at heart, we share their joy and grief, we assert the truth of life and our humanitarian ideals. We are concerned with what spells out the genuine national character, and present it through our work. That is our commitment."

I left the Ensemble with vivid images of whirling dancers and colourful Ukrainian folk music. One of the tunes they had played was a little Ukrainian folk song which my grand-

mother had taught me when I was a child. It was still dancing around in my head as I walked through the bright streets of Kiev on my way back to the hotel.

* * *

A meal in a Ukrainian restaurant is a singular experience. There are specialities which are characteristic of the region, some world famous, some not. This, of course, is the birthplace of Chicken Kiev which is popular in British restaurants. The white meat of plump hens or capons is stuffed with butter before being cooked in the oven. Borsch is a characteristic soup made traditionally on a base of meat stock and beetroot. It is delicious in its hot or cold versions. My grandmother used to make summer borsch and winter borsch. In the summer she would pour mushroom stock over young beetroots chopped with their leaves, then add chopped celery, marrow, tomatoes, carrots and spring onions and cook them all together with herbs and seasoning. She would then leave the borsch in the refrigerator and serve it cold with a large spoonful of *smetana* or yoghurt in each plate.

In cold weather she would make what she called "real" Ukrainian borsch with everything in it but the kitchen sink, as British people say. It was a big nourishing mélange of meat stock, shredded beetroot and cabbage, tomatoes, carrots, onions, parsley, potatoes, herbs and seasonings. One or two big meat bones would be cooked in the borsch and when it was ready the bones went to the dog, in fact he knew they were for him and would be waiting for them. My grandmother would serve the piping hot borsch in old-fashioned willow-pattern soup plates which she kept on the Welsh dresser in her kitchen. Black bread would accompany the borsch, and after a big plateful of the stuff I never had room for anything else. I always found it fun to eat at my grandmother's house because at home with my parents I was never allowed to eat in the kitchen. The kitchen at home was for cooking, the dining room was for eating. My grandparent's big winter borsch is to be found everywhere in the Ukraine. The chilled borsch with *smetana* is more unusual.

Another dish I tried in restaurants was a particular fa-

vourite of my grandfather's, fish baked in *smetana.* A whole fish is rolled in salted and peppered flour, fried in butter, then baked in the oven with mushrooms, sliced hard-boiled eggs, thin slivers of fried potato, grated cheese and *smetana.* The fish is sprinkled with chopped parsley before serving.

Characteristic of the Ukraine are *kotlety* and *bitki* which are cutlets and rissoles. Minced meat and onions are seasoned, made into rolls, dipped in breadcrumbs and fried. They are served with *kasha* (any kind of cooked grain), or vegetables or both. A vegetable dish which I tried for the first time in Kiev was green beans with walnut sauce. The cooked beans are served with a sauce made of pounded walnuts, chopped onions, parsley or dill, garlic and seasoning mixed with wine vinegar.

In the evenings the larger restaurants in the Ukraine usually have a small folk band which entertains the diners with music of the region. The musicians wear national costume and play traditional folk instruments including accordions. Between courses diners often like to get up and dance.

* * *

Some of the most interesting experiences on my musical journey were my visits to the music schools. While I was in Kiev I was invited to the Special Secondary School of Music which was opened in 1935. There are four of these Special Schools in the Ukraine, the other three being in Kharkov, Lvov and Odessa. Gifted children from all over the Republic are trained in these schools. Oleg Mamchenko, director of the department of Dancing, introduced me to his wife, the bandora player Antonina Mamchenko who is an Honoured Artist of the Ukrainian S.S.R. I also met Victor Yermakov, the pianist who is director of the Music department.

This is a school for children who are exceptionally gifted in music or dancing. They stay at the school from the age of seven until they are eighteen, and their training is subsidized by the State. As well as their tuition, the State pays for instruments, music scores, and board and lodging for the students. Victor told me something about the work of the school.

"We teach piano, all the instruments of the orchestra,

and the history and theory of music. We prepare the students for entry into the Conservatoire. Seventy of our students, you know, have won international prizes. One of our students, Anatoly Melnikov, won the Tchaikovsky International piano competition. The composer, Jan Frenkel, was a graduate of this school. He is now chairman of the Light Music Department of Composers' Union."

"We have a hundred and sixty teachers at this school," said Oleg, "thirty-eight of whom are from the Kiev Conservatoire and fifty of whom are post-graduates of the school. There are five hundred students here. Graduates of this particular school have the right to enter any music school they choose in the Soviet Union."

The school has an orchestra of sixty players, a boys' choir, and a piano, violin and 'cello trio. Together with students of the dancing school, they give free concerts for the children of surrounding districts. They have a music laboratory, and a library with a hundred and twenty thousand books on music and drama.

"The students have arranged an impromptu concert for you," said Victor. "Some of our outstanding students are waiting to perform for you."

We all went into a small modern concert hall with large windows. The hall was dominated by an August Forster concert grand piano standing on a platform. Ten year old Olga Vlasova, a student in her fourth year, played two waltzes by Chopin, the A minor opus 34 number two and the E minor opus posthumous. A young trio of third year students played two Russian songs arranged by Komarovsky. The violinist was ten years old, the 'cellist nine, and the pianist eleven. This was their first year of playing as an ensemble.

Thirteen year old Valentina Lissitza from Kiev, a seventh year student, played two Preludes by Rachmaninov. Her teacher is Igor Ryabov, a professor from the Conservatoire. Then I heard a Gavotte and Bandarillo by Grubnov played by three small violinists and a pianist. A ten year old girl pianist then played the beautiful Ballade number 1 in G minor opus 23 by Chopin, the ultimate in romantic piano writing. If she gave it a shade too much rubato in the presto con fuoco it is no more than I did myself when I was learning the piano at her age and enthralled by Chopin.

I found the concert extremely interesting. After it was over, it was time for me to meet Gallina Kirillova, a former Prima Ballerina of the Kirov Opera and Ballet Theatre in Leningrad, and People's Artist of the USSR. Kirillova was with the Kirov Ballet from 1942-1961 and Prima Ballerina from 1956-1961. She is now assistant ballet master at the Special Secondary Music School. She invited me to an impromptu concert given by some of her most gifted students and led the way into a large modern theatre, the stage of which was brightly lit. There was an unmistakable atmosphere of expectancy in the air.

Students from the eighth year danced part of the first act of Delibes' ballet *Coppélia.* They were in full costume and make-up for the occasion. Then a fifteen year old boy soloist gave a stunning performance of the Gerda variations. A few minutes of sheer enchantment followed when a dozen ten year olds performed the March from Tchaikovsky's *Casse Noisette* (Nutcracker). They were all dressed as miniature soldiers and performed their dance with a rare panache. It was, as we say in English, a hard act to follow, but a seventeen year old youth, a graduate of the school, danced part of Minkus' *Don Quixote* to the admiration of us all. So great was his control that some of his movements elicited spontaneous applause from the few of us in the audience. The impromptu concert ended with seven folk dancers in national costume performing some of the Ukraine's most lively national dances.

Afterwards we all went into a dining room and sat down to a lunch of chicken salad, fruit, chocolate, and tea. The ubiquitous mineral water was there for those who wanted it. The room was decorated with flowers, and round the walls were photographs of dancers. After lunch Kirillova showed me hundreds of photographs of her students and many of herself during her time with the Kirov. She gave me several of her own photographs as mementos.

I spent hours at the Special Secondary Music School and could happily have stayed all day because I am fascinated with music and ballet schools. The process of moulding a musician or a dancer is as interesting as the performance of an experienced artist. The one is the natural sequel of the other. It was late afternoon by the time Kirillova had shown me all her photographs, and I had to get back to my hotel,

as usual, to change for the evening.

I was going again to the Taras Shevchenko Opera and Ballet Theatre, this time to see Levenskold's ballet, *La Sylphide*. This is a romantic ballet in three acts which is about a young Scotsman who is engaged to marry a good, wholesome Scottish lassie. But human nature being what it is, he turns from what he has to yearn for something else, something unattainable—as in all good romantic stories. He pursues an elusive Sylphide who has fatally enslaved him and the ballet inevitably ends in a satisfying tragedy.

I was fascinated by the costumes of the production as the male dancers are required to wear Scottish national dress. I have seen *La Sylphide* a number of times because it is very popular in Britain, but somehow I found it strange to be in the middle of the Ukraine watching people wearing tartans, kilts and plaids. There was just something intriguingly incongruous about it. The tartans looked authentic to me and, knowing the Soviet passion for detail and perfection, they probably were.

* * *

Muzychna Ukraina in Gogolevskaya Street in Kiev is the music publishing house of the Republic. Since 1966 it has been publishing scores, musical literature, music teaching books, and the theory and history of music. Its aim is to propagate mainly the work of Ukrainian, Russian, Soviet and foreign composers both for mass and specialist readership.

Tamara Anufrienko, director of the publishing house, welcomed me and introduced me to her colleagues Vera Strakhova, the chief editor, and Vladimir Mordan, poet and member of the Union of Writers, who is the chief editor of musical literature. Tamara showed me some of Muzychna Ukraina's latest publications. There was the score of the first national Ukrainian opera, the ever popular *Zaporozhets za Dunayem*, and there were operatic scores by leading Ukrainian composers including *Yaroslav Mudriy*, by Georgi Maiboroda, who is now in his seventies. There was also the one-act opera *The Spring Festival* by Leontovich which was written to commemorate the fifteen hundredth anniversary of the city of Kiev.

There was an edition of G. M. Sasko's "Echoes of Centuries", a cycle of eight piano pieces which the composer had also dedicated to the fifteen hundredth anniversary of the founding of Kiev. Each of the piano pieces has a theme taken from the ancient chronicles. The illustrations on the score show details of the frescoes from St. Sophia's Cathedral.

Ukrainian orchestral music figures prominently in Muzychna Ukraina's list, and I saw works by Victor Kossenko (1892-1938) and Rybalchenko's Symphony "A Lay of the Warfare Waged by Igor", which was written in 1978. There was a volume of the most famous romances by Nikolai Lýsenko (1842-1912). All the Slavonic composers were represented on the orchestral list. There was a series entitled "Pearls of World Music" which included a piano score of Mozart's Requiem. All the piano Sonatas of Schubert were there, and Tamara showed me an edition of Bach's B minor Mass for choir and piano, with Latin text. "The Bandora Repertoire" contains works by Ukrainian composers and arrangements of Western classics. Looking through the volumes I found arrangements for bandora of a Prelude and Fugue by J. S. Bach and one of Mendelssohn's "Songs Without Words".

The "First Acquaintance" series represented the music of popular young Ukrainian composers. Among these publications I saw the songs of Vladimir Ivasyuk. Ivasyuk's career is inseparably linked with the The Pine Tree and The Red Rue vocal and instrumental ensembles. There was a book of songs by Igor Poklad and a book of songs by Alexander Zuyev. Tamara gave me two miniature books—one a tiny hardback book, decorated in red and white, containing the words, in Ukrainian, and the tunes and sixty three Ukrainian folk songs; the other slightly larger book is an exquisitely illustrated volume called "Lisova Pisnya", the scenario of a ballet by M. A. Skorulsky and a fairy opera by B. D. Kipenko.

There were innumerable editions of Ukrainian folk songs arranged for different combinations—voice and piano, vocal trio with bandora accompaniment, unaccompanied chorus, and piano for four hands. There was a series of biographies of leading Ukrainian composers including Lev Revutsky (whose music I was soon to

hear) and Andrey Shtogarenko (whom I was soon to meet). Muzychna Ukraina publishes books on musicology, music criticism, musical theory and tutors for music schools. Among the publications especially for children I saw "Lady Quail", a selection of Byelorussian folk songs arranged for children's chorus, and "Verdant Song" by Vasyl Vergovinetz (1890-1938). Vergovinetz was a conductor, choreographer and ethnomusicologist, and his "Verdant Song" is a serial in installments written over many years. It was created for children under school age and contains stories and outdoor games which the composer considered spiritually uplifting and physically beneficial to very young people. The collection includes round dances (traditional Slavic folk dances) and work games. "Conceited Leveret" is a new work for children's theatre by the Ukrainian composer, Yudif Rozhavskaya. It is a musical tale based on a story by the Soviet writer, Sergei Mikhalkov. It is supplied with musical and poetic texts and stage directions to encourage the children to create a good performance.

October March is a book of songs to verses by Vladimir Sosyura, an Ukrainain poet. It is of special interest to older children and teenagers and contains settings by well-known Ukrainian composers. The collection also includes the songs "Lenin" by Vladimir Vermenych, "Pioneers, Donetz Song" by Konstantin Dankevich, and "First of May Song, Holiday" by Vsevolod Rozhdestvensky.

Muzychna Ukraina has published two children's Cantatas by the Ukrainian composer Lesya Dychko who specialises in writing music for children. The two Cantatas are called "The Disc of the Sun" (to verses by Dmitro Cherednichenko) and "Hail, Oh New and Lucky Day" (to verses by Yevgeny Avdiyenko). They depict Ukrainian landscapes at the four seasons of the year, and the special games of each season. The Cantatas sing of happy childhood.

The publications which Tamara showed me were far too numerous for me to mention them all. I was astonished at the sheer volume of Ukrainian music which so far has not reached Britain. I remember being lucky enough to get a ticket to see the Ukrainian Folk Dance Ensemble when it visited London in the 1960s. There wasn't an empty seat in the theatre and the audience hugely enjoyed the

brilliant folk music and dancing, but that is about all we in Britain ever experience of Ukrainian musical culture. Tamara was saddened by this and shook her head when I told her that we hear practically nothing at all of the classical music of the Ukraine.

There was an edition of Zhanna Koloduba's "Fairy Tales of Hans Andersen" for piano. "Little Hare, Dance" is an illustrated collection of Russian folk songs for children arranged by Russian classical and Soviet composers. The collection includes two songs arranged by Rimsky-Korsakov. "There was a Birch in the Field" and "Little Hare, Dance", and there was a song arranged by Balakirev, "We were sowing Millet". "The Sunny Path" is a children's songbook arranged mainly by the composers of the nineteenth century.

We all sat down to a table spread with refreshments, and we each made a toast which we drank in cognac, in coffee or in mineral water according to preference.

"To Ukrainian culture," said Tamara.

"To music," I said.

"To all composers," said Vera Strakhova, and "To all musical children," said Vladimir Mordan.

We ate fruit and cakes and the Ukrainian version of "Lame Bears" and then it was time for Tamara to take me to meet the Ukrainian composers who were in a house a few doors along Gogolevskaya Street.

Four composers were there to welcome me, Andrey Shtogarenko, Arkady Philippenko, Tatiana Nekrasova, and Vitaly Kireyko. Shtogarenko was born in Dnepropetrovsk on October 15, 1902. He is the son of Jakov Shtogarenko, a lathe operator at a metallurgical plant, amateur musician and the organiser of an ensemble of folk instruments. Andrey Shtogarenko received his first music lessons from his father, and when he was old enough to go to the music school, he took piano lessons at the Dnepropetrovsk School of Music. After he had completed his studies he became the director of a bayan ensemble. From 1930-1936 he studied composition at the Kharkov Conservatoire under professor B. Bogatyryov. During the Great Patriotic War he was executive secretary of the Composers' Union of the Turkmen S. S. R., and it was at this time that he wrote what he considers to be one of his

best works, his Cantata-Symphony "My Ukraine", which was awarded a State Prize in 1946. From 1954-1968 he was rector of the Kiev Conservatoire and since 1960 he has been professor of composition there. Since 1968 he has been a member of the board and secretary of the USSR Composers' Union.

Shtogarenko's music is often described as "heroic, epic, lyrical, optimistic and life-asserting". When I met him it occurred to me that Shtogarenko's personality is very much like his music. He is a man of rare charm. His music is characterised by some unusual modal harmonies and orchestral brilliance and he has always, he told me, worked in a variety of musical genres. He has written four symphonies, a String Quartet entitled "Armenian Sketches", a Trio called "Youth", a number of symphonic suites, and "Partisan Scenes" for piano and orchestra. Another work which was written during the Great Patriotic War was his symphonic suite "In Memory of Lesya Ukrainka" (the poetess) which was awarded a State Prize in 1952.

His "Kiev Symphony" was awarded the Ukrainian S. S. R. Taras Shevchenko State Prize in 1975 and he has been widely acclaimed for his chamber and vocal symphonic music. Shtogarenko is a man who has been awarded many honours for his services to music. He is People's Artist of the USSR, he holds the Order of Lenin, the Order of the Red Banner of Labour, the Order of the October Revolution, and the Bulgarian Order of Cyril and Methodius, and he has won a number of medals.

Of his four symphonies the first is called "Symphonic Tales", the second, "In Memory of the Friend", the third is the "Kiev Symphony", and the fourth is dedicated to the Komsomol. He has written a Violin Concerto, a Violin Concertino, and a Concertino for Piano and Orchestra. There is a Poem for String Orchestra named "In Memory of Kobzar", a Poem called "Russia" for soloists, chorus and orchestra set to verses by I. Vazov and Kh. Botev, and a "Youth Poem". His "People Never to Be Forgotten" is a set of ballads for bass voice and orchestra set to verses by S. Gordeyev, V. Firsov and A. Tvardovsky. His vast output has been published and recorded and is frequently broadcast on radio and television all over

the Soviet Union and abroad.

Arkady Philippenko, winner of the USSR State Prize, has a large and varied musical output. This includes symphonic music, string quartets, piano music, and a Cantata called "Let Us Glorify the Word of Lenin". He has also written an operetta "Buzanov Story" and a Poem "The Thought of Immortal Kobzar". Philippenko has always given special attention to the writing of music for children of school age and under, and his work is very popular with this age group. In 1979 Muzychna Ukraina published his "Small Children's Book of Songs" which contains the popular "Ilych's Ribbon", "My Beloved Land", "Our Tutor", "Crystal Winter" and "Spring Waltz".

"My younger son, Vitaly, is also a composer," Philippenko told me, "and my grandson, Bogdan, is in the Special Secondary Music School here in Kiev. He is nine years old."

"What is he studying?" I asked.

"Piano." He smiled and added, "He is also very fond of football and hockey." He told me something about his Fourth String Quartet.

"I wrote it in 1976," he said. "It was inspired by Tolstoy's *War and Peace.* In the second and third movements I aimed to depict the recruitment of soldiers and the sorrow of their families who do not know why they fight. The third movement is based on a single West Ukrainian folk dance for males, and the finale symbolizes the pity of war and depicts the Symbol of Life which cannot be removed from our homeland. At the very end you can hear the bird which returns to the devastated land. Would you like to hear the Quartet?"

"I certainly would," I said.

We listened to a recording of the Quartet which was a synthesis of lyricism and progressive harmonies, much of it in the minor mode. It makes use of folk melodies and rhythms and, from time to time, the influence of Borodin, Prokofiev, and Shostakovich can be heard.

Vitaly Kireyko, like Shtogarenko and Philippenko, is one of the leading figures in Ukrainian music. He studied with Lev Revutsky and has composed five symphonies and a large output of ballet music. The theme of his

ballet *The Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* is based on the Legend of Love. It is a classical ballet which incorporates folk rhythms and its "Dance of the Shepherds", the "Lyric Dance of the Heroine", and the *pas de deux* are performed in folk costume. His *The Forest Song* became a landmark in opera art. It is a fairy drama by the Ukrainian poetess Lesya Ukrainka which formed the basis of a ballet by Mikhailo Skorulsky as well as Kireyko's opera. Kireyko is People's Artist of the Ukrainian S. S. R. and Candidate of Art Criticism.

Tatiana Nekrasova is one of the most important musicologists of the Ukraine. Much of her work is done in the realm of folk music and folklore.

"We have catalogued more than twenty thousand folk songs and dances," she told me. "The essence of Ukrainian culture survived even foreign oppression and the attacks of the Mongols and the Turks in the eighteenth century. Ukrainian folk music has influenced all Slav culture, not only in our own country but in Czechoslovakia and Poland."

"As you already know," said Philippenko, "Ukrainian classical music is based on the work of Lýsenko."

"Do you know," said Shtogarenko, "that the Tsar prevented Lýsenko's music from being performed in the Ukrainian language. Musicians were forced to perform it in French."

"Lýsenko set more than fifty works to the poetry of Taras Shevchenko," said Tatiana. "They are romances in different moods, lyrical, dramatic, joyous. They are as popular as folk songs."

As we were talking the table was spread with refreshments.

"Come, take something to eat and drink a toast with us," said Shtogarenko, "and then we'll listen to some more music." Our first toast was to "Ukrainian Music" and the second was to "Music of all nations". Then we listened to part of the Second Symphony by Lev Revutsky, the Ukrainian composer who was born in 1889 and died in 1977. Revutsky's creative work marks an epoch in the musical life of the Ukraine. His Second Symphony is a landmark in symphonic writing and reflects the spirit of a new progressive society with high philosophical ideals. "Let

us construct" are the words which he inscribed on his manuscript. The Symphony is a monumental work, rich in colourful harmonies and vibrant orchestral texture. Nearly all its themes are founded on folk melodies which, in Revutsky's hands, gain a new profundity and subtlety. The Second Symphony, which dates from 1927, is in the lyrical, romantic tradition and it is dedicated to the tenth anniversary of the Great October Revolution. The first movement is remarkable for the prominence of the *sopilka*, which is a fife, with a sound something like a recorder.

After we had listened to the music Kireyko told me something about the Union of Composers of the Ukraine.

"It was founded in 1932," he said, "and our members are composers and music theoreticians. Ten years ago we had only a hundred and fifty members. Now we have two hundred and fifty. There are seven branches of the Union in the Ukraine, Kiev, Kharkov, Lvov, Odessa, Dnepropetrovsk, Crimea and Donetsk."

"We have regular meetings," added Philippenko, "where we perform our own music. There have been performances of more than a hundred new works recently. The general public can attend our concerts free of charge."

"The Union is State subsidized," said Tatiana Nekrasova. "Composers get a salary from the government and we have a House of Art in the forest, ten miles from Kiev. We can stay there for up to two months in a two or three room cottage, free of charge. We also get a travel allowance."

"There is a collegium authorized to maintain composers, and our aim is to propagate music among the masses," Kireyko told me.

"The Composers' Union has its own manual print shop so that we composers can print our own scores," added Philippenko.

We listened to the "Ukrainian Quintet" by Lyatoshinsky, a work for piano and string quartet. Boris Lyatoshinsky was born in Zhitomir on January 3, 1895. His outstanding musical ability became evident in early childhood. His violin and piano lessons started early and by the end of his fourteenth year he had written several miniatures and a piano quartet which were performed in Zhitomir. In 1914 he studied composition at the Kiev Conservatoire

Kreshchatik –a major thoroughfare in Kiev

The traditional arts festival
"Kiev Spring" (1983)
in the capital of the Ukraine

The Lenok Ukrainian Song and Dance Ensemble performing a Ukrainian dance

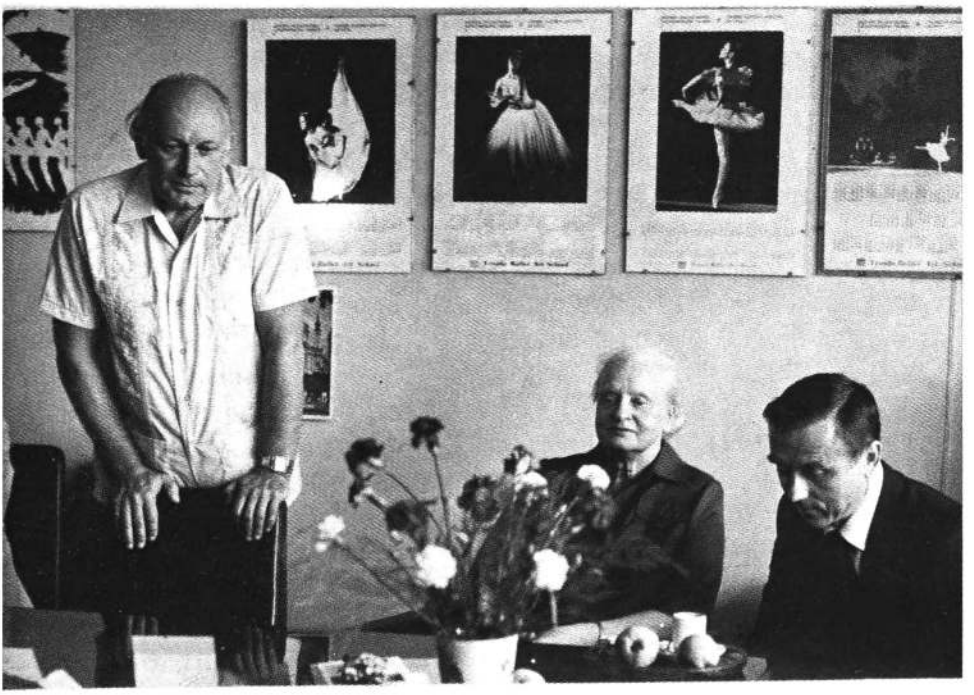
N. Prokopenko, a teacher at the Kiev Conservatoire, with members of the Conservatoire's folk instrument orchestra. The students are playing *kobzas*, which Prokopenko himself makes

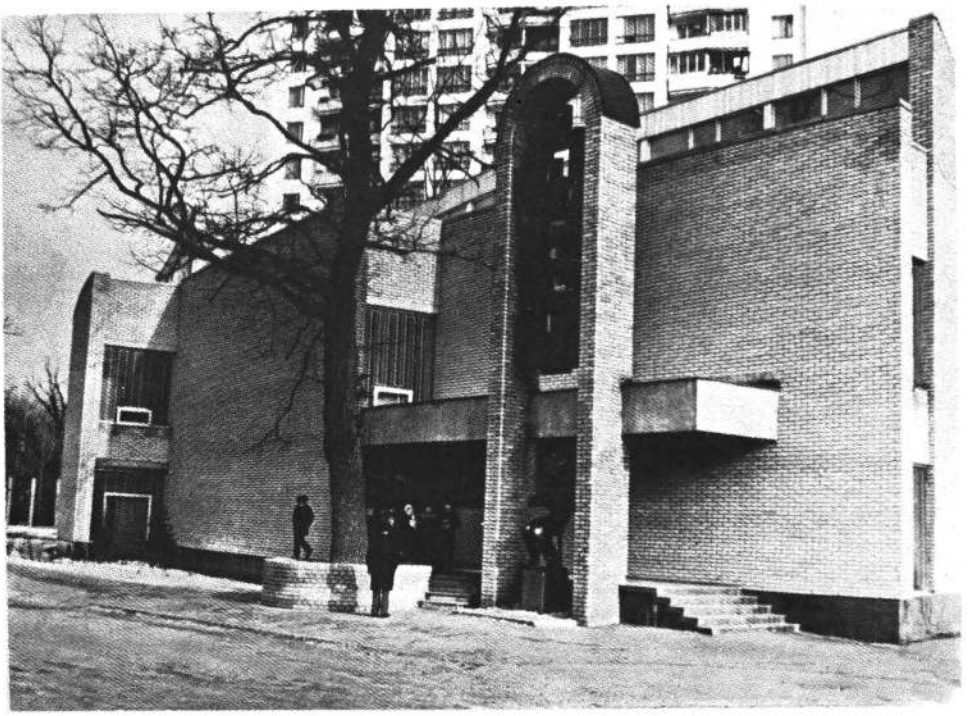
The Ukrainian House
of Organ and Chamber Music in Kiev

The Taras Shevchenko State Theatre of Opera and Ballet in Kiev

People's Artist
of the Ukrainian S.S.R.
Anatoly Kocherga (bass)
singing the role
of Boris Godounov

Ballet Master
of the Kiev Music School,
Galina Kirillova—a former
Prima Ballerina of the
Kirov Opera and Ballet Theatre
in Leningrad *(centre)*





The Children's Library in Kiev

under Reinhold Glière. In 1919 he himself became a teacher of composition at the Conservatoire with which he was closely associated for the rest of his life. He died in 1968 aged 73. His "Ukrainian Quintet" which was written in 1942 is generally considered to be his most important work written during the Great Patriotic War. It has been described as "a symphony for five instruments".

Shtogarenko presented me with three recordings of his music, the "Partisan Scenes", "My Ukraine" and his Third Symphony. He autographed them for me and wrote a bar of music in my notebook. "Partisan Scenes", which was written in 1959, is a suite for piano and orchestra whose content is linked with the events of the Great Patriotic War. "My Ukraine", a cantata-symphony for soloists, chorus and orchestra, is setting of verses by Andrei Malyshko and Maxim Rylsky. His Third Symphony, the "Kiev" is generally considered to be one of his most profound achievements, and again the composer found inspiration in the events of the Great Patriotic War. Shtogarenko inscribed on the manuscript, "Dedicated to the Hero-City, Kiev". The concept of the symphony is an assertion of humanistic ideals and is connected with the fraternal unity of all Slavonic peoples. It embodies images of both the historic past and contemporary life. The past is depicted in ancient songs, *bylinas* and everyday chants. The four movements of the symphony represent first the heroic struggle of his homeland against the forces of fascism, the joy of victory, the landscape of the Ukraine and the progressive ideals of the new life of the people. It is one of the Ukraine's epic symphonies.

"We thought you would like a recording of some of Lyatoshinsky's music," said Kireyko. "Here is his violin and piano sonata of 1926 and his Second Trio for violin, 'cello and piano."

"And here is a record of some folk songs by Stetzenko," said Tatiana Nekrasova. "The recording is so new that the cover hasn't been printed yet."

"Here is another record we'd like you to have," said Kireyko. "It's the Choral Symphony by Stankovich. He would have liked to have been here today to meet you but unfortunately he is away at present. But he sends you this record with his best wishes."

Yevgeny Stankovich, who was born in 1942, achieved his first outstanding success when there was a performance of his Sinfonietta at the Plenum of the Ukrainian Composers Union Board. His Choral Symphony "I Reaffirm Myself", which is a work in six movements, is considered to be a synthesis of the best aspects of contemporary Ukrainian music. The vocal parts are set to lyrics by P. Tychina. The Choral Symphony was awarded the State Republican Taras Shevchenko Prize.

Philippenko then presented me with recordings of many of his songs for pre-school children. He autographed the records with the following words, "Greetings to Sonya Richmond. Welcome to our musical land".

After two final toasts, "To our welcome guest" from the composers and "To Ukrainian Music" from me, we bade each other farewell. Tatiana and I kissed each other on both cheeks in the Ukrainian manner.

"Come back soon to the Ukraine," they said.

"Thank you all," I replied, "it's been a lovely day."

Andrey Shtogarenko offered me his arm and together we went downstairs to a waiting car. I left him at the Conservatoire where his class of students of composition awaited him.

* * *

The Lenin Museum of Kiev is a large, modern-style building across the square from my hotel. The museum dates from 1938 but this new building, which was designed by the architect, Gopkalo, was completed only in 1979. Its seventeen halls contain over eight thousand exhibits connected with the life and work of Lenin.

The first thing I noticed as I went up the flight of wide, shallow steps to the entrance hall were four Young Pioneers, two boys and two girls, guarding a sculpture of Lenin. A guide, Grigory, came to show me round the museum.

"The best schoolchildren between the ages of ten and fourteen are allowed to stay near the sculpture," he told me.

"How long do they stand on guard?" I asked.

"Fifteen minutes at a time," he replied, "and then their comrades take their place and so on throughout the day."

I had decided that it would be helpful to have a guide on this occasion and, as I looked around, I was glad of my decision otherwise I might have missed many things of vital interest. The walls of one of the halls were hung with eight enormous tapestries, each one a hundred square metres. They were made in Poltava (east of Kiev) and they depicted scenes from Soviet life after the October Revolution. I was drawn to a dramatic sculpture of a worker which was made in 1922 by Ivan Shadre, and a remarkably fine bust of Lenin by Michel Aronson, the French Jewish sculptor. Lenin had refused to find the time to pose for the sculpture so Aronson made the bust from sketches he had done of the Soviet leader. It is said that he made five hundred sketches of Lenin from life before making the sculpture. The Kiev bust by Aronson is a copy of the original which was at first in the Paris Louvre and is now in Moscow's Central Lenin Museum in Revolution Square.

"Lenin is the most popular author in the world," Grigory told me. "His books are translated into a hundred and thirty-six languages." Then he showed me a display of the works of Lenin in more languages than anyone but a linguistics scholar would know existed. There were many photographs of Lenin's revolutionary comrades including Kamenev, Zinoviev, Litvinov (the future Commissar for Foreign Affairs) and Voroshilov (the future Field-Marshal). There were, of course, innumerable photographs of Lenin himself. One that I found particularly memorable was of him dressed as a train driver with smoke-begrimed face, a disguise which enabled him to avoid arrest on more than one occasion.

"Half a million roubles in gold were offered for Lenin's arrest," said Grigory.

I saw a photograph, taken in the Moscow Kremlin in 1920, of Lenin with the British writer, H. G. Wells (whom the Soviets call Herbert Wells.) In his book *Russia in the Shadows*, Wells refers to Lenin as "The Dreamer of the Kremlin", an appellation not wholly appropriate, for Lenin was nothing if not a man of action. It was interesting to see the first issue of Lenin's *Iskra* (Spark), the newspaper of the revolutionary Bolsheviks, and some of Lenin's letters to his family who lived in Kiev for a while.

Their name was Ulyanov and there is a street in Kiev which bears their name.

Lenin was fond of music, his favourites being Russian folk songs and dances, revolutionary songs, and the music of that other great defender of human rights who was born exactly a century before him, Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827).

A large oil painting by Nysyensky in the museum depicts Lenin and the writer, Maxim Gorky, listening to Beethoven's Sonata in F minor opus 57 known as the "Appassionata". Beethoven wrote this sonata in the summer of 1804 while he was staying at the house of his friend, Count Franz von Brunswick to whom the sonata is dedicated. We are told that Beethoven composed it straight through from beginning to end in a collossal burst of creative energy. It is the first piece of music that Beethoven composed after the completion of his opera *Fidelio* which is his personal statement about human rights and the dignity of the individual. His gigantic Third Symphony (The Eroica) was written about the same time. The "Appassionata" is the most important piece of Beethoven's piano writing of that period. It has three movements, a passionate allegro assai, an andante con moto with variations, and a titanic allegro ma non troppo. Of Beethoven's thirty-two piano sonatas Lenin is said to have particularly admired the "Appassionata" because the quintessence of the composer's noble and fiery spirit can be heard in its powerful music.

Like Lenin, Gorky was fond of music including that of the Armenian, Spendiarov who was the first composer to set Gorky's texts to music. Spendiarov set his Ballad for Bass and Orchestra to Gorky's poem. This is an example of what is known as Spendiarov's all-European music, an attractive work depicting the love of the young Mayko for his fairy in bright and expressive music. Later Spendiarov produced his musico-declamatory work "Edelweiss", again inspired by a Gorky text. It is likely that Gorky introduced Lenin to both of these works.

The Lenin Museum has an absolutely fascinating exhibition but what nailed me to the floor was some movie-film footage of the 1917 Revolution which was shown on closed-circuit television. I stood there riveted by scenes

from this momentous political event photographed as they were actually happening, and I heard a recording of Lenin's voice delivering an impassioned speech. It was extremely interesting to hear the voice of the Founder of the Soviet Union. This, with the film footage brought the October Revolution vividly to life.

There were blown-up photographs of the front pages of the world's leading newspapers carrying banner headlines, reportage and photographs of the Revolution. The British press was represented by the *Daily News* and the *Daily Chronicle* both dated Friday, November 9, 1917. Both carried action photographs of the momentous events in Russia.

After engrossing morning looking at thousands of exhibits I reached the airy elegant top floor of the museum and sank gratefully into one of the deep luxurious armchairs provided for visitors with aching feet. As I left the building the Young Pioneers were still silently guarding the bust of Lenin down in the entrance hall.

* * *

Like a homing pigeon I returned again and again to the Taras Shevchenko Opera and Ballet Theatre, and on my last day in the Ukraine I went there again to meet some of the directors. Anatoly Kotko, director-manager, introduced me to Dmitri Smolich, producer and People's Artist of the Soviet Union, Vladimir Rozhok, deputy director of the ballet company, Elena Potapova, former prima ballerina and now teacher, and choreographer Anatoly Shikeiro.

Anatoly Kotko holds the Taras Shevchenko State Academic Prize, Order of Lenin and the Order of the Red Banner of Labour. He added something about the work of the theatre to what I had discovered already.

"We have five hundred and fifty artists in the company," he told me, "one hundred and eighty in the ballet company, one hundred and sixty in the two orchestras—one for opera and one for ballet. There are sixty five soloists, many teachers and scenery workshop technicians and administrative staff."

Dmitri Smolich told me something about his own

background and about his work.

"I come from a theatrical family," he said. "My father was the main opera producer in Kiev. I myself was educated at the Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko Theatre in Moscow. I was trained in Art Theatre and Drama."

I told Dmitri Smolich that that was the theatre at which I had seen Rimsky-Korsakov's *May Night.*

"When did you graduate?" I asked him.

"In 1941," he replied, "on the eve of the Great Patriotic War."

"What was your first production?"

"Verdi's *La Traviata* in the Ukrainian language. Over the years I've produced nearly all of Verdi's operas in Ukrainian, though recently we've been producing Verdi in Italian. The public sometimes likes to hear what opera sounds like in the original language even if they can't quite understand it. Of course our programme leaflets give a full account of the action."

"Do you produce any Mozart?" I asked him.

"Yes, *The Magic Flute* and *Don Giovanni.*"

"In Ukrainian?"

"Yes, usually."

"And Wagner?"

"Oh, yes, the public likes *Die Walküre* and *Lohengrin.*"

"In Ukrainain?"

"Yes."

That was something to think about. Wagner in Ukrainian!

"Do you produce operas for children?" I asked.

"Oh, yes," he replied. "We produce five children's operas by Gubarenko, who lives in Kharkov and by Philippenko whom you met the other day. The operas are produced during the two long school vacations."

"I'm interested to know that French opera is also popular here in the Ukraine. I hear that both *Carmen* and *Faust* were recently produced at this theatre and elsewhere. Were they performed in Ukrainian?"

"Yes, but recently we have also been producing them in French. Do you know," he remarked, "that our theatre is the only one in the Soviet Union which has produced Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots?*"

The theatre produces not only the masterpieces of

the classical repertoire but also contemporary works which reflect modern Soviet life. The repertoire includes the Tchaikovsky operas and Nikolai Lýsenko's very popular *Natalka of Poltava* together with many works by Ukrainian composers including *The Sinking of the Fleet* by Vitaly Gubarenko, and *Bogdan Khmelnitsky* by Konstantin Dankevich. In Poltava, incidentally, was the paternal home, now made into a museum, of the Russian writer Nikolai Gogol.

Some Ukrainian singers have become world famous. In 1976 for instance, at an international music competition in Japan, the soprano Gizela Tsipola, a soloist with the Kiev opera, was hailed as the finest Madame Butterfly in the world. The baritone Anatoly Mokrenko was invited by a British recording firm to sing a part in Prokofiev's *Ivan the Terrible.* At an international contest in Barcelona, Spain, Ludmilla Yurchenko won a gold medal for her performance in Mussorgsky's *Khovanshchina,* and during my stay in the Ukraine the Kiev opera company's bass, Manolov, was preparing to fly to Italy to sing at La Scala, Milan.

The Kiev opera and ballet companies have frequent cultural exchanges with foreign countries. A concert group of twenty Ukrainian dancers recently flew to Italy to perform Ukrainian and Russian ballet. Puccini's *Tosca* was produced by the Kiev opera company in Yugoslavia, the ballet company is planning a visit to Czechoslovakia and two leading Yugoslav and two Bulgarian dancers received their training in Kiev. Several members of the Kiev opera company were recruited from an Austrian training school.

I was interested to hear something of Elena Potapova's background.

"How old were you when you decided you wanted to become a dancer?" I asked her.

"I saw my first ballet at the Palace of Pioneers when I was seven," she replied, "and from that time I wanted to be a dancer."

"And do you come from a dancing family?" I asked.

"Oh, yes, I am one of three sisters. Varvara is a ballet teacher in the GDR—in Leipzig, and Anna is a producer of ballet here in the Ukraine."

"Were you trained here in Kiev?"

"No, I am a graduate of the Art Theatre in Moscow."

"Which were your favourite roles?" I asked.

She thought for a moment and then smiled.

"Well, Odette in *Swan Lake* of course and *Gizèlle* were my favourites but I also liked to dance in *La Sylphide* and *The Fox's Song*—that is one of our Ukrainian ballets."

Anatoly Shekeiro told me something about his background and career.

"I was born in Vladivostok," he said, "and I saw my first ballet in the local Pioneer's House. I graduated from the ballet school in Perm, in the Urals, then I worked as a dancer at the State Institute of Theatre Art in Moscow for five years and then I came to the Ukraine. Twenty years ago I became a choreographer. I worked in Lvov for a while and then in 1966 I came as a choreographer to this theatre."

"In your career have you had any contact with British dancers?" I asked.

"Oh, yes," his face lit up. "In 1974 I worked in Japan with your Margot Fonteyn."

"What are you working on now?"

"Glazounov's *Raimonda*," he replied. "We have now added it to our repertoire. There is a performance of it tomorrow evening. Would you like to come and see it?"

"I would indeed," I said, "but I leave the Ukraine tomorrow evening."

"Where are you going?" asked Anatoly Kotko.

"Armenia."

"But you will come again to the Ukraine?" asked Elena Potapova.

"I certainly will."

"Then we will see you again."

"Yes, I hope so."

We all wanted mementos of our meeting so we went out into the spring sunshine and posed for several photographs outside the theatre. At the foot of the steps leading to the main entrance a little toffee-brown dog lay curled up fast asleep on the pavement. Our comings and goings disturbed him not at all. He remained oblivious throughout our photo session and he was still asleep when I said goodbye to everyone and drove away.

* * *

I was invited to see an exhibition of Nikolai Syadristy's microminiatures at the Kiev-Pechersk State Historico-Cultural Museum. Syadristy was born in 1937 and is a man of varied interests. He was educated as an agronomist (a rural economist), trained in a college of art, and surprisingly enough, is an expert in underwater sports. For the past twenty years the art of microminiature has been his hobby. His skill in this extremely rare art form has earned him the award of Honorary Master of Ukrainian Folk Art. His work is honoured by two personal permanent exhibitions, one in the Moscow Polytechnical Museum and the other in the Kiev-Pechersk State Historico-Cultural Museum in Kiev. He is the author of the book *Mysteries of Microtechnology*.

This was a subject about which I knew nothing whatsoever, so I had no idea in the world what I was going to see. To my astonishment I entered a world of wonder. As I have already said, the Soviet Union never ceased to surprise me. The exhibits are so incredibly tiny that they have to be seen under a microscope. There were many microportraits of famous people. I saw a water-colour of the American writer Ernest Hemingway executed on half a wild pear seed, and bas-reliefs of Dante and Leonid Brezhnev done on infinitesimal pieces of sloe stone. The complete texts of two of Lenin's books and his articles on the subject of peace were executed in microminiature with steel pens which were specially made by Syadristy.

Until Syadristy took up his extraordinary hobby, Japan's miniature books had been the tiniest in the world. But now Syadristy's miniature book *Kobzar* (Folk Minstrel) claims that distinction, being almost nineteen times smaller than the smallest possible miniature book ever made in Japan. Did I not describe the Soviet Union as the land of superlatives! "Small is Beautiful" too in this extraordinary land. The pages of Syadristy's book are so thin that they can only be turned with the end of a sharply pointed hair. It looked as though it had come from the fairies and to increase my sense of something fey, I learned to my astonishment that the book had been sewn with cobweb! Two of the book's twelve pages are

illustrated, one with a portait of the Ukrainian bard, Taras Shevchenko and the other with a drawing of "Father's Hut".

One of the prettiest of the exhibits was called "A Rose in the Hair" and it was just that, a red rose painted inside a drilled-out hair which had been polished to transparency. I was fascinated by "The World's Tiniest Acting Electric Motor", a miraculous creation twenty times smaller than a poppy seed. How is such a thing possible? I am still wondering. This incredible mechanism was exhibited at the International Exhibition in Montreal and I haven't the slightest doubt that many Canadians are wondering too.

The flea is a creature which endeared itself to Modest Mussorgsky by providing him with an opportunity to indulge his taste for sardonic humour. He celebrated the flea in what is perhaps the most famous of the sixty-five songs he wrote. Now it has been immortalized again by Syadristy in his microminiature "The Shod Flea". I looked through the microscope and to my amazement saw a flea wearing golden shoes. Mussorgsky would have liked that.

* * *

A journalist from Kiev Radio with a tape recorder in her hand came to my hotel to ask if I would like to give her my impressions of Ukrainian culture.

"Yes, of course," I said, "but it is such an enormous subject. Where do I start?"

"Wherever you wish," she said. "Just say whatever comes into your head."

I am not unused to microphones and broadcasting so I recorded my impressions onto tape and I assume that they were duly broadcast, although I was out of the hotel for most of the time that I remained in the Ukraine and so had little opportunity to listen to the radio.

As I was packing to leave the Ukraine I did hear a broadcast of Schubert's "Erlkönig" (Erl-King) sung by a baritone in Russian. Somehow the Russian language, like Goethe's original German, seemed to enhance the terror-haunted atmosphere of Goethe's eerie poem about a father riding through a windy night with his young son in his

arms, the sinister Erl-King, crowned and robed, in pursuit of the boy who is wild with fear. At the end of the poem, and of the song, the child dies in his father's arms.

There is a particular problem of interpretation with "Erlkönig" because the singer has to sing in four voices—first the narrator's, then the father's, then the child's and then the Erl-King's. The greatest possible contrast has to be displayed between the voices so that the listener can hear who is "speaking". This baritone managed to lighten his voice to convey, without any distortion of his vocal line, the shrill cries of the child and the fatally ingratiating tones of the Erl-King. It was a fine vocal interpretation with the darkly urgent piano accompaniment that this song needs. I must have switched on at the end of a Lieder recital because applause followed the song and then the programme changed.

In total contrast, an orchestra then played the Capriccio Espagnol opus 34 by Rimsky-Korsakov. This work was begun in 1886 and received its first performance in St. Petersburg in the following year with the composer conducting. Rimsky-Korsakov originally intended the work to be a fantasy on Spanish themes for solo violin and orchestra but then he extended it into its present form. It has five sections, first an alborada (a dawn serenade) followed by an andante con moto, which is a set of five variations on a theme played with French horns. There is a repetition of the alborada, and the fourth section, the allegretto, follows. This is a scene and gypsy song with cadenzas for trumpets, solo violin, flute and harp. The final section is a fandango of the Asturias, the brilliant orchestration suggesting castanets and guitar. The work ends with a further repetition of the alborada.

I switched off the radio. It was time to go.

Victor and Leonid drove with me to the airport. They gave me a parting bouquet of tulips.

"Goodbye," they said, "come back soon to the Ukraine."

"I will."

"And we all look forward to reading your book. You will write about everything you have seen in our Republic, won't you?"

"Of course," I replied.

Dusk was falling as the plane took off. As we rose into the air I looked out of the window at the towers and domes and lights of the city receding into the darkening light. We climbed higher towards the gathering night-clouds and the last faint points of light below us flickered and went out. The vast rolling countryside of the Ukraine was lost to view as we climbed into the clouds.

Chapter 3

A NEW WAY TO EAT ORANGES

"What is more hard than rock,
What is softer than the wave?
Yet hard rocks are hollowed by the soft water."

(Ovid)

A night flight and worlds away from the Ukraine ... well after midnight the big Tupolev aircraft had set us down in Yerevan, the Armenian capital. All around me Armenians, clutching children, suitcases and knobby bundles were pouring down the flight steps, swarming onto the tarmac and into the airport building.

As soon as I stepped off the aircraft the enchantment of Armenia enfolded me. The night smelled of trees, the air was warm and sweet. Yerevan lies at three thousand feet above sea level on the Armenian plateau and is surrounded by mountains. I could positively feel, if not see, these hills out there in the rustling murmurous oriental night.

Late though the hour was, a representative of the government of Soviet Armenia, Vahan Khachatryan, was waiting at the airport to welcome me. He had never seen me before, nor even seen a photograph, so I wondered how he knew who I was out of a whole plane-load of passengers. He came straight up to me. Perhaps it had something to do with the fact that I was carrying a bouquet of flowers. We collected my luggage and he drove me to my hotel, the *Armenia* off Lenin Square. Yerevan was quiet and there was not much traffic on the roads at that time, so it didn't take long for us to get to the city centre. The atmosphere in the hotel was relaxed and the people on duty were pleasantly easy-going. The kindly woman in charge of the floor where my rooms were had sloppy mules on her feet and was wearing a loose garment of indeterminate character. She was sharing a bag of apples with another women similarly dressed, and

they were drinking tea from a large samovar behind the desk. I was to discover that the samovar was for the use of everybody and anybody on that floor and that she and her colleagues would dispense tea at any hour of the day or night.

I hadn't expected to see a samovar in Armenia, and yet why not? It only seems to us to be one of the symbols of Old Russia. In actual fact it came to Russia from Persia only in the eighteenth century. My grandmother always made tea in a samovar and the resulting brew came out rich and strong and berry-brown. She would put a little of it into each cup and fill it up with boiling water. No one in my family could ever persuade her to make tea any other way.

After the woman had shown me to my rooms, Vahan bade me goodnight and arranged to send a car for me in the morning. I went to sleep as quickly as I could. So far as I was concerned the morning couldn't come soon enough. I had always wanted to see this country.

* * *

Armenia has many appellations all connected with its stony landscape—A Kingdom of Stone, A Poem in Stone, A Temple of Stone. Armenians themselves call their country Hayastan which means The Land of Stones. Millenia of volcanic eruptions covered the land with its stony carapace. In the hands of skillful masons, this stone has become part of Armenia's natural wealth.

This is one of the most picturesque areas of Transcaucasia and of the Soviet Union. It lies on the southern slopes of the Armenian Mountains, along the northeastern part of the range, and it is dominated by the peaks of the Lesser Caucasus. Armenia is a high-lying land, its average elevation being four thousand five hundred feet. Even its deepest valleys are between fifteen hundred and two thousand four hundred feet above sea level, which accounts for the singular clarity and freshness of the air. This smallest of the Soviet Republics is a land of extinct volcanos, jagged mountain peaks, forests, deep ravines, waterfalls, mountain lakes and swift-flowing rivers. There are over a hundred of these mountain lakes, the largest, highest,

and most famous of them being Lake Sevan. From this lake flows the Razdan River, which flows through Yerevan and which is its only outlet.

Armenia has an enormous number of underground streams. Geologists estimate that there are at least seven thousand five hundred places where they surface as springs. Rich in wildlife, Armenia is a sanctuary for many mammals and birds rarely seen in any other country. Wolves, bears, moufflons (wild mountain sheep), wild goats and wild boars can be found in Armenia's remoter regions. Incredibly, one can even encounter leopards!

But mine was a musical journey, and so the first place I visited was the house of the Armenian composer Spendiarov in Nalbandyan Street in Yerevan. Spendiarov lived there for the last two years of his life (1926-1928) and the house has now been made into a musical museum. It is interesting that this was the first house to be built in Armenia after the country became a Soviet Socialist Republic on the 29th of November 1920. The museum's director, A. Mesropyan, welcomed me and introduced me to several of his colleagues including Sergei Sarajan, deputy head of the department of musical education of the Ministry of Culture. During my stay Sergei was to introduce me to many of Armenia's outstanding cultural achievements.

We all sat down in Spendiarov's comfortable sitting room while the director told me many things which added to my knowledge of the great Armenian composer. His music is seldom performed in Britain and so he was something of a remote luminary in my musical Universe. Alexander Spendiaryan (pronounced Spendiarov in Russian) was born to Armenian parents on November 1, 1871 in the settlement of Kakhovka in the Crimea. His date of birth makes him a contemporary of Rachmaninov, who was born in 1873. Spendiarov's mother, a good pianist, encouraged a love of music in her son whose first musical impressions were of Crimean Tartar melodies and the music of different oriental nationalities of the region where he spent his childhood. Later he was to translate many Armenian and Tartar songs into Russian.

One of the great musical experiences of Spendiarov's boyhood was a visit to the Vienna State Opera. He himself is on record as saying that the Viennese orchestra was the first as such that he had ever actually heard. In his home region there had been only military bands of which, he admits, he had been very fond as a child. He writes that he heard one or two bad performances of "outdated" Italian opera but then, after leaving college, he went to Vienna with his father and attended a magnificent performance of Bizet's *Carmen.* Although after this he dreamed that some day one of his own compositions might be performed by a great orchestra, neither he nor his parents seriously considered that he should take professional lessons in composition. Thus it was that when he went to Moscow for his higher education, he entered the University and not the Conservatoire. He studied for a year in the faculty of Natural Sciences and then transferred to the Law faculty, from which he graduated in 1895 at the age of twenty-four. But during these years he had attended violin classes under the direction of a musician named Pekarsky, who played in the Bolshoi Theatre Orchestra.

Spendiarov's success with the violin was such that he became the leader of the University's student orchestra which, at that time, was conducted by the composer and ethnographer N. Klenovsky. It was he who encouraged Spendiarov to study composition under his personal tuition. He studied for two years, his lessons ending when Klenovsky left Moscow to take up a post in Tbilisi, now the capital of the Republic of Georgia.

1896 was a momentous year in Spendiarov's life, for it was then that the twenty-five year old budding composer went to St. Petersburg to show his compositions to Rimsky-Korsakov. Spendiarov expresses his own feelings thus: "In spite of the praise I had received from Klenovsky and other musicians, until I met Rimsky-Korsakov I still wasn't sure whether I possessed the necessary ability to devote myself to the life of a composer and to give up my law studies. The only musician I could trust to solve my dilemma at that time was my beloved composer, Rimsky-Korsakov."

After examining Spendiarov's compositions Rimsky-

Korsakov, recognising the Armenian's ability, agreed to become his teacher.

From this time, Spendiarov never looked back as a composer. He wrote many minor works for piano, violin, 'cello, and voice, and his two Romances "Oriental Melody" and "Oriental Lullaby" became very popular. In 1900 he wrote his "Concert Prelude" which Rimsky-Korsakov praised highly and which is considered to be his first mature work. Its first performance in 1901 made Spendiarov famous, and the best of the Russian publishing houses of the time (Belayev, Urgenson, Bessel) began to publish his music. His most famous symphonic poem "Three Palms" opus 10 was first performed in St. Petersburg in 1905 with the composer conducting. This won for him the Glinka Prize for the first time. He was to win it twice more—for his Legend for Contralto and Orchestra, "Preacher Beda" and for his musico-declamatory work, "We Shall Rest", which is a setting of Sonya's monologue from Chekhov's play *Uncle Vanya.*

Spendiarov was a fine conductor and was generally considered to be the best interpreter of his own works, which is by no means an accolade accorded to every composer. Strangely enough some composers are not the best interpreters of their own music.

Although he conducted many concerts in Transcaucasia, Georgia, Moscow and St. Petersburg, Spendiarov's main musical activity was in his native Crimea, largely in Yalta and Sudak. Several of his works were inspired by the national music of the Crimea—his "Crimean Sketches", two songs, a lullaby, and a song for voice and orchestra. He also arranged many Tartar songs.

There were many illustrious names among Spendiarov's friends and colleagues—Glazounov, Lyadov, Chekhov, Gorky, Chaliapin and Arensky to name a few. Of these he had an especially warm and close friendship with Glazounov. He also met the great choreographer Fokine at the Berlin Opera in 1913.

In 1911, when Spendiarov was forty-two, he wrote the first of the many works which were to make Armenia re-claim him for her own. This was "Forsaken Tombs" for tenor and orchestra, a musical score based on the writing of the Armenian Khachatur Abovyan (1805-1848).

In his autobiography, Spendiarov writes that he considered this work to be a milestone in his creative life, and from this time on, Armenian themes appeared with ever-increasing frequency in his music. A meeting with the poet, Ovanes Toumanyan, who introduced Spendiarov to Armenian folk songs and performers, proved the turning point. Armenia had become a Soviet Republic in 1920, and when in 1924 the Armenian government invited Spendiarov to move to Armenia and direct the young Republic's musical life, the composer accepted. He was fifty-three years old when he settled for good in Armenia, and from then until the end of his life he played a vital part in the development of Armenian musical culture. He was the founder of an orchestra at the Yerevan Conservatoire where he was a teacher and became, of course, its conductor. Their concerts included European symphonic classics with which Spendiarov had long been familiar.

Although he was deeply involved in the musical life of Armenia, his public duties did not interrupt his creative flow, and it was during these last years of his life that Spendiarov composed his most famous and stylistically complete folk music. There are many people in Armenia today who remember the great man with affection, for he had an attractive personality and maintained close contact, not only with Armenian musicians, writers, painters and other artists, but with the masses and their folk music which so strongly influenced his own work. There is a story that Spendiarov often appeared on the crowded streets of Yerevan and, on one of the corners of Abovyan Street, he would stop to listen to an old piper playing a primitive instrument. It is said that the composer would often invite the piper to his house and ask him to play his native folk melodies.

In 1926 Spendiarov was honoured by the Armenian government with the title of People's Artist, to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of his public life in music. His activities in all his fields of interest continued until 1928 when, after a short illness, he died on May the 7th. He was fifty-seven years old and in the prime of his creative work.

There was a fine stereo system in Spendiarov's sitting room, and the director of the museum invited me to listen

to some recordings of Spendiarov's music. Afterwards he presented me with a recording of "Yerevan Sketches", "Crimean Sketches" and an orchestral suite from the opera *Almast.*

After our discussion about Spendiarov's life and work, and after listening to the music, the director invited me to examine some of the musical instruments in the museum. As we went downstairs to the basement, where the instruments are on display, he told me that his mother, Argavni Mesropyan, had a strong musical connection with Britain. She had studied piano at the Academy of Music in London and had gained an LRAM, the Academy's degree.

The museum displayed a fascinating collection of Armenian and oriental folk instruments including tars, *kyamanchas*, rebecs, *santurs*, lyres, and tambours. We were joined by several musicians who played some of the instruments for me. The kyamancha was invented in the eleventh century and at first had only three strings. A musician named Alexander Organyan invented a kyamancha with four strings, and his daughter, Sophia Sardaryan, played one of these instruments for me, with over-hand bowing. Martil Khachaturyan ("No relation of the composer," he smiled) played an Armenian classical melody with the kyamancha, which he himself designed, played with under-hand bowing. There are four voices in the kyamancha family—soprano, alto, tenor, and bass.

The rebec is one of the most ancient of the bowed instruments and one of the ancestors of the violin. It has a narrow drop shape with a long thin neck, and has from six to twelve strings. There are various voices in the rebec family roughly corresponding to soprano, alto, tenor and bass. The tenor instrument is still used in Greece and Crete, under the comprehensive name of Lyra, to this day and is occasionally still used in some of the remoter parts of Spain.

The director showed me some beautifully made rebecs which had been inlaid with mother of pearl.

"The original scores for the rebec were written in Sanskrit," he told me, "and the instrument, by tradition, is usually played by women."

The santur was more familiar to me as it is a form of dulcimer. The instrument is a shallow, four-cornered closed

box upon which wires are strung. These are struck with small padded wooden hammers. The instrument is similar to a psaltery with the exception that the strings of the psaltery are plucked instead of hammered. The santur, in other words, is an ancient ancestor of the piano. Sometimes it has four legs and sometimes is without them and played on the knee. Yepraxia Overkimyan played several Armenian folk tunes on the soft-voiced instrument. Her particular instrument had four legs standing on the floor, and she sat on a chair to play.

The dulcimer was first mentioned in English literature about the year 1400 in "The Sqyre of High Degree". Samuel Pepys mentions that in 1662, when he was just under thirty years old, he heard the dulcimer for the first time at a puppet show. The instrument has always been in use in Britain to a certain extent and even in the present day it is used, in a modified form, in school percussion groups. But in Eastern Europe, notably Armenia, Hungary, Roumania and Czechoslovakia, it is used in gypsy and folk bands. The Hungarian composer, Zoltán Kodály, uses the dulcimer in his orchestral suite "Háry János", and its sound is similar to the Armenian santur.

We next came to an Armenian lyre made of cowskin, which had eight steel strings. The four bass strings had been covered with copper to produce a deeper and fuller sound. The lyre is an instrument of great antiquity. It is, in effect, a small harp but it differs from the harp in two particulars—the strings are stopped by the left hand and it is played, not with the fingers, but with a plectrum which is held in the right hand.

The tambour is also an instrument of great antiquity. A family of them, soprano, alto, tenor and bass were displayed in one of the museums glass cases. The one which the director took out to show me was made of pine wood and had four strings, two made of gut and two of steel. The body was shaped like a lute but was more circular in outline and with a flat back. Mention of this instrument is made in the work of the Armenian poet Sayat-Nova and in that of Omar Khayyám.

After we had all drunk a glass of chilled melon juice, we went outside to take photographs of each other and of the house. Then Sergei and I said goodbye and drove

off to the Ministry of Culture in Isahakyan Street. There he introduced me to the deputy Minister, Sylva Mekinyan, who is also a violinist. She invited me into the board room to meet some of her colleagues and to discuss Armenia's cultural achievements.

Armenian culture stretches back to antiquity. The first Armenian theatre was established between two thousand and two thousand five hundred years ago, and it is on record that the "Bacchae" of Euripides was staged in Artashat as early as 53 B. C. In the Matenadaran museum in Yerevan there are examples of local Bronze Age art. Archeologists found an almost complete four-wheeled carriage which is now on display, together with bronze vessels, axes, jewels and inlaid daggers from the thirteenth century B. C. Cuneiform tablets found on the site identify King Argishti and the city of Istikuni. In the writings of Tacitus we can read a description of the finest surviving example of a Graeco-Roman temple which can be seen in the Garni Hills outside Yerevan. A sundial over four thousand years old was found in the Zangezur region in the southeastern area of Armenia.

Nearer to the present day, the Armenians were the first peoples of the Caucasus to stage Shakespeare. Armenian actors were performing in Moscow, Tiflis (the capital of Georgia now called Tbilisi), St. Petersburg, Paris and Constantinople before the 1917 Revolution. An anthology of Armenian poetry, edited by the Russian poet Valery Bryusov, was published in Moscow in 1916. Some of the poetry in this anthology dates back to the early Middle Ages. In recognition of Bryusov's services to the culture of their country, on his fiftieth birthday in 1923 the Armenian government awarded him the title of People's Poet of Armenia. He was the first poet to be accorded that honour. In 1916 the *Collection of Armenian Literature*, edited by Maxim Gorky, was published in Petrograd.

Music and poetry appeared many centuries ago in Armenia. In ancient times folk songs were preserved in a written form based on a system of notation combining notes and letters. This system was called *khazy*. Over the centuries the musicians who were able to decipher the *khazy* steadily decreased to a mere handful of individuals, and a centuries-old musical heritage was in danger of being lost

because its notation was becoming inaccessible to musicians trained in more modern notation.

Since the 1917 Revolution Armenian musical culture has advanced by leaps and bounds. The composer Komitas (1869-1935) undertook the task of deciphering *khazy*, thereby reviving many Armenian folk songs. He promoted Armenian music on concert tours, displaying its unique qualities throughout Russia and Europe. Yerevan Conservatoire, founded in 1923, bears his name and there is a Komitas String Quartet.

The first of Armenia's many operas was written a hundred years ago. Spendiarov's opera *Almast* was staged for the first time in 1930 and performed on the opening day of the Armenian Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre on January 20, 1933. Since then the theatre has staged Armenian, Russian, Soviet, and foreign operas and ballets. In addition to three State symphony orchestras, the Republic has the Sharakan Orchestra of Ancient Folk Instruments and two chamber orchestras. In the cities outside the capital and in the countryside of Armenia, there are a hundred and fifty musical establishments for children, some of which have their own symphony orchestras and smaller musical ensembles.

"Music is Armenia's most popular art form," said Sylva Mekinyan. "As well as classical ensembles we have a Theatre of Musical Comedy and Operetta, various song and dance groups, the Armenian Light Music Orchestra, and the State Choir."

Sergei told me that the works of the eighteenth century poet and singer, Sayat-Nova are renowned in Armenia and the neighbouring republics of Georgia and Azerbaijan. He wrote his songs and poems in the languages of all three.

"We have a travelling ballet troupe of five hundred," said Sylva Mekinyan. "They went to London last December."

"Yes," I said, "it was widely publicised and tickets were completely sold out weeks in advance. The company was an enormous success in Britain."

Sylva Mekinyan smiled. "It is nice to hear that. Our opera company has also been to Britain, you know, and the ballet company has been to Mexico, Argentina, Hungary and Algeria. We have constant cultural exchanges

with other countries. Our Komitas String Quartet was recently in Latin America."

Our discussion turned to the subject of opera and I wanted to know who was the favourite Western operatic composer in Armenia. Sylva Mekinyan didn't hesitate. "Oh, Verdi," she replied. "We love his music in Armenia."

"And which are his most popular operas?" I asked.

"The favourite of all is *Otello,*" was the reply, "but we perform most of Verdi's works including his Requiem."

"There is an astonishing amount of musical activity in Armenia," I said, "very much more than I expected."

"Yes," said the deputy Minister, "Armenia is the smallest of the Republics but our music resounds throughout the Soviet Union and the rest of the world."

It was here in the board room of Armenia's Ministry of Culture that I discovered a new way to eat oranges. During our conversation the table around which we were all seated had been spread with refreshments. Fruit juice was served in terra-cotta mugs, and there on the table was a large plate of unpeeled sliced oranges. I looked thoughtfully at this. Oranges are among my favourite fruits, but I have always declined to eat them in public because they are so messy. Removing the peel has the zest squirting in all directions, usually straight into one's eye. To divide the orange into segments has the sticky juice running over one's fingers. Does one then put a whole segment into one's mouth thereby overfilling it, or does one bite into the segment at the risk of the juice running down one's chin? No, no. To eat oranges in public has always been unthinkable. And now here in Armenia I looked at the slices of orange in the plate and, as I bit (safely) into a slice of apple, I wondered how on earth one could deal with a slice of *unpeeled* orange in public or even, for that matter, in private.

I was soon to learn. As Sergei picked up a slice of the orange I saw that the peel had been slit with a single cut. He then simply opened out the slice with the thumb and forefinger of each hand, and ate the juicy flesh of the orange, biting it straight out of the pith. No mess, no sticky fingers. I then saw that all the orange slices had been similarly treated with a single cut, and one by one they were taken up by my Armenian friends and eaten, with

not a drop of juice where it should not have been.

Impressed though I was by this simply ingenious device, I didn't quite dare to try it there and then, but made a resolve to practise eating oranges this way when I was alone, which I did with complete success. After that I was able to eat oranges in public (in Armenia anyway) as to the manner born. Why on earth, I wondered, don't people eat them that way all over the world?

When it was time for me to leave, Sylva Mekinyan presented me with records of Komitas' music and of Armenian folk songs. She also gave me an Armenian silver filigree bracelet "so that you will remember us", as though I could ever forget anybody or anything I saw in Armenia. It is hard for me even to imagine how anyone who has ever been to Armenia and met its people could possibly ever forget.

* * *

One of Yerevan's main roads is Lenin Avenue, and it is here that the tree-encircled Spendiarov Theatre of Opera and Ballet is situated. It was designed by the architect Alexander Tamanyan (1878-1936) and is considered to be one of Armenia's best examples of architecture of the Soviet era. It has two auditoria, one for opera and ballet and one for concerts. The architect's son, Georgi Tamanyan, completed the concert hall after his father died. In the year of his death the elder man was awarded a gold medal at the 1936 Paris International Exhibition. The grey stone statue of him in Yerevan depicts him at his work desk.

The opera company's large repertoire includes classical and modern works by Armenian, Russian, Soviet and foreign composers. The people at the Ministry of Culture had all suggested that I see one of Armenia's most famous and typical folk operas, *Anush* by Armen Tigranyan, who wrote both the music and the libretto. *Anush* is based on the poem of the same name by the Armenian poet Ovhanes Toumanyan, who wrote "The Siege of Tmuk Castle" which was made into an opera by Spendiarov.

The opera and ballet auditorium, which has one thousand two hundred and sixty seats, is shaped like an amphitheatre.

It has those two absolute essentials for an opera or ballet theatre, namely efficient air conditioning and fine acoustics.

Anush is a colourful folk tale, enriched with dancing and most beautiful costumes. The music is a flow of melodies mainly on the pentatonic scale, many of them in the minor key—the typical sound of Armenian folk music. I found it not unlike Jewish music of the kind heard in synagogues—rich and haunting with rather plaintive and soulful harmonies.

During the interval Sergei introduced me to one of the opera's leading tenors who had come round to the front of the auditorium to meet me. He was wearing the costume of an Armenian shepherd. "Forgive me," he said, "I only came to say hello. I must return backstage immediately." He kissed my hand and vanished.

* * *

Yerevan is a rosy city. This is because so many of its buildings are made of pink tufa, the local volcanic stone. But tufa isn't only in several shades of pink, although this colour is most common. It has a natural variety of warm colours from peach, tawny amber, and a pale clear yellow to white and sometimes even black. There is a quarry at Azizbekov where the tufa looks so much like the wood of an oak tree that it can actually be used for wall panelling. Other tufa is reddish purple with ivory-coloured veining and, in the region of Lake Sevan, there is tufa which is the colour of a turquoise.

Tufa has many virtues as a building stone. It is abundant, easy to quarry, easy to carve and, although it is light it is very strong. It is easy to cut into pieces with a saw and it will not shatter when nails are hammered into it. Above all it is a good insulator, for Armenia has an extreme climate with blazing hot summers and winters which can sometimes be arctic. The average temperatures are 24-26 degrees Centigrade in July and minus 5 degrees in January which seems reasonably temperate on paper. All the same, the Armenians are glad that tufa is such an efficient insulator because it ensures that buildings made of it are comfortable in all weathers. Tufa is

also porous and absorbs moisture, but never grows damp. It retains warmth and, for good measure, is even soundproof. Did ever stone have so many virtues!

Interspersed with the many pink buildings in Yerevan there are structures made of basalt, onyx, perlite, obsidian and marble which give the city a very colourful aspect indeed. The thousands of trees, shrubs and flowers with which the city is adorned add to this effect. The buildings of Yerevan blend beautifully with Armenia's stony landscape, and architects have managed to make the city a harmonious fusion of ancient and modern styles. It is one of the oldest and most beautiful cities in the Soviet Union.

My tour of Yerevan began right there in Lenin Square where my hotel was situated. The first things I had noticed in this large oval "square" were the "singing fountains", a unique and intriguing blend of music, water and colour designed by the Armenian engineer-scientist, Abram Abramyan. The "singing fountains" is a favourite meeting place where people forgather, especially in the evenings, to enjoy the cool music of the splashing water and the rainbow play of light upon it. Water is a recurring theme in Yerevan. Like Rome it is a city of fountains. Everywhere we went that day I could see them sparkling in the spring sunshine, decorative fountains, drinking fountains, swimming baths and ornamental lakes. There is even an Avenue of Fountains flanked by tall green trees. Shahumyan Boulevard (named after one of Lenin's closest comrades, Stepan Shahumyan (1878-1918) has more fountains than I was able to count, but Sergei, who was driving the car, told me that there are in fact two thousand seven hundred and fifty jets of water. At the entrance to the Park of the Communards, of whom Shahumyan was one, there is a statue of a water seller. This is a ragged young boy with a jar of water under his right arm and a drinking vessel in his left hand. In the old days ragamuffins like this would sell their water in the streets and in the crowded markets, for Armenia is a dry and stony land, and water used to be its most rare and precious commodity before irrigation schemes brought the land to life. The Park of the Communards has quaint little bridges spanning its shimmering canals. Water, water everywhere! Water, and, in particular, Armenia's many rivers, have always been celebrated in Armenian

folklore. There are many songs and stories about the Araks River, which is the largest in the Armenian foothills, and there are dozens of legends and traditions connected with it.

Driving on, we soon came to more water, the torrential River Razdan, which flows from Lake Sevan, with its three-span bridge. Next to this is the place where Armenians make wine. This is the tall-towered basalt building of the Ararat wine processing plant which stands on the site of the former sardar palace destroyed long ago. A large building with neither doors nor windows facing outwards, it is decorated with sculptured Armenian wine jugs, and has an arcaded loggia which is very striking. The historian Xenophon tasted the wines and beers of Armenia and later described them in his "Anabasis". At the back of the building, inscribed over the entrance, are the words of Maxim Gorky written in Armenian, "Long live the people who understand the art of making wine and who transfer through it the strength of the sun to the spirit". At the other end of the bridge is the brandy distillery with its nine arches and its imposing flight of stone steps. Aram Khachaturyan, Armenia's most famous composer, got a job here while he was a student at the University to supplement his allowance. It was a hard job, dragging heavy sacks and crates of bottles about and once he cut his finger so badly on a broken bottle that he feared for a while that he would have to abandon his ambition to become a 'cellist. After this, with the help of his brother Levon, he got a Sunday job singing in a church choir. Although he was in fact able to continue with his 'cello classes after his hand had healed, he realised that he was never going to become a great 'cellist and—to the benefit of the whole world of music—he went to Moscow to study composition at the Conservatoire under Nikolai Myaskovsky.

Looking more closely in the daylight at the building in Lenin Square, I noticed that many of them were decorated with finely wrought stone ornamentation with motifs of birds and mammals, sheafs of wheat, and bunches of grapes and other fruits. The stone masons of Armenia have perfected to a high degree the ancient art of working with stone. I saw this kind of decoration wherever I went in Armenia. The southern part of the square is dominated

by a statue of Lenin made by the Armenian sculptor, Sergei Merkurov (1881-1952) who studied in Paris under Auguste Rodin in 1909. The fact that Merkurov knew Lenin personally accounts for the particularly lifelike quality of the statue, the unveiling of which took place on November 29, 1940 on the twentieth anniversary of Armenia's becoming a Soviet Republic. November the 29th is an annual holiday in Armenia.

Yerevan is a place of imposing statuary: Armenian heroes, musicians, authors, poets, scholars and statesmen are immortalized in stone all over the city. Here is Shahumyan standing on his plain stone plinth, here is a white marble head of the beautiful-faced, long maned poet and folk singer of the eighteenth century, Sayat-Nova, here is the seated figure of the scholar Mesrop Mashtots, the founder of the Armenian alphabet, and here is the dramatic equestrian statue of the Herculean warrior hero of Armenian folk epic, David Sasunsky. And what was this?

"Slow down please," I said to Sergei, with my head out of the car window. "What an unusual thing! "

What had caught my eye was a white marble sculpture of two graceful curled hands touching each other. I had never seen anything like it before.

"It was presented to Yerevan by our twin city Carrara, in Italy," Sergei told me and I wasn't in the least surprised to learn that Yerevan's reciprocal gift to Carrara was on the motif of water. It was in fact a decorated sculpture of a water spring made from pink tufa.

"There is a copy of it in this square," said Sergei, pointing, "look, over there."

There is another "hands statue" in Yerevan, one which affected me deeply. Hewn out of dark pink tufa, it is the monument "In Defence of Peace" sometimes called the "No To War" monument. The hands are twisting upwards out of the earth, the fingers spread in hope, in supplication, and clenched in determination. The very rough-hewn quality of the sculpturing adds to its powerful impact. As a personal statement it speaks more eloquently than a thousand words. It was created by the sculptor V. Khachikyan and the architect F. Zargaryan. It stands in a park encircled by tall trees, with close-clipped grass and green painted park benches.

I saw many places of cultural interest including the Armenian State Gallery, which houses what is considered to be one of the finest collections in the Soviet Union, the Museum of Modern Art, the Komitas Conservatoire, and the Matenadaran Institute of Ancient Manuscripts.

I also saw the Small Philharmonic Concert Hall which is used for piano and violin recitals and literary readings. I saw the Stanislavsky Russian Theatre, which was founded in 1937 and whose company presents Russian classical and contemporary drama, the Sundukyan State Academic Theatre, and the Large Philharmonic Concert Hall, which has thirteen hundred seats. Yerevan has a hundred and nineteen libraries, the largest of which is the Myasnikyan State Library which has six million, five hundred and fifty thousand books. The city has two hundred schools, Armenian, Russian, and Azerbaijani.

We ended our tour on a high hill outside Yerevan where we had a panoramic view of the entire city. It was in this place that I saw clearly for the first time the legendary Mount Ararat which provides Yerevan with a breathtaking, almost fancifully beautiful backdrop. The mountain had been obscured by mists for most of the day, but now the air was clear and Mount Ararat was revealed in all its mystery and majesty. The mountain isn't actually in Soviet Armenia, it is some way over the border inside Turkey, but the huge, eternally snow-capped giant has always been part of Armenia's life and thought, part of her internal as well as her external landscape. How could it be otherwise? It is an enthralling unforgettable sight.

The highest mountain actually in Armenia is the four-peaked Mount Aragats which, unlike Ararat, loses its snowcaps for a short time during the summer. A thing of great beauty itself, it is the fate of Mount Aragats to be forever overshadowed by the fabulous Ararat.

* * *

Sylva Mekinyan invited me to attend a concert rehearsal in Yerevan's Chamber Music Hall. This unique hall, which was designed by Stepan Kyurkchyan, presents organ, solo, and chamber music recitals. It is a modern style building and the walls of the auditorium

are adorned with sculptures of metal. The exquisitely decorated small organ has elaborate wood carvings around its pipes, creating a most lovely effect.

The rehearsal was given by the Sharakan Ensemble of Ancient Music, whose artistic arranger and conductor is Grigor Danielyan. The musicians played a selection of works by Komitas for various small combinations. The first piece was for two violins, two flutes, bass woodwind and *skripka.* The second piece was a song on the pentatonic scale performed by the mezzo-soprano, Eleonora Melkunyan, and accompanied on the flute and organ. The third piece was a melody in the minor mode for two violins, two flutes, organ, tambourine and bass woodwind. The fourth of the Komitas group, again in the minor mode, was a work for two recorders, two violins, organ and three singers, Eleonora Melkunyan, Greta Antonyan (soprano) and Ruben Tehuntz (bass). The organ was played by Tatevik Ayrapetyan.

Some of the music of Bach followed, part of his "Musical Offering", an aria from the St. Matthew Passion, and a Cantata for soprano, three violins and organ, sung in Armenian. Some music of Purcell and Monteverdi followed sung in Latin, with bass woodwind and organ obligato. After this the ensemble played a mediaeval Italian dance for bass recorder, and an ancient Armenia folk dance. In this last piece the mezzo-soprano doubled on the triangle and the soprano doubled on one castanet.

After the rehearsal we all went out into the sunshine to take some souvenir photographs. I was soon driving out of Yerevan with Sergei and Vahan to see some of the Armenian countryside. We drove through ancient landscapes dotted with villages along a long winding road, and along the ridge of the Gegami Hills. Along the way I saw many rectangular standing stones decorated with elaborate stone "lace". Armenians call these stones *khachkars* which means "stone crosses" because the "lace" motifs on each *khachkar* always include a cross, symbolic of the Tree of Life. There are thousands of them in Armenia and in the Middle Ages they were used as gravestone, as monuments to victorious battles, and to mark the founding of a new town and other important events. They are unique to Armenia and it is said that there are no two exactly alike.

Armenia is a land of almost four thousand stone monuments, cromlechs and dolmens from the Bronze Age, Urartu fortresses, heathen temples and shrines, early Christian places of worship, and mediaeval monasteries and castles high in the mountains. We descended through a steep pass to the Garni Valley. There are caves in the sheer rock walls of the pass which once provided the Armenians with refuge from their invaders but which are now almost inaccessible. Even in modern times Armenia has been attacked and plundered by hostile neighbours, and people sought shelter in the mountains where they built their village fortresses, feeling safer among the high stoney crags. One of Armenia's mountain passes is named after Pushkin, who visited the country in the summer of 1829. He describes his visit in his essay "Journey to Arzrum".

Near the village of Garni in the valley of the Azat River, the Garni Fortress, built in the first century A. D., stands on a cliff. Made from huge blocks of basalt, the fortress was once the summer palace of King Trdat the First. Its porticos were supported by twenty four Ionic columns, and its statues and the high, carved Roman vaults were still intact when it was discovered. The steep valley narrows and then emerges into the perpendicular-walled Gegard Basin which is honeycombed with caves and spectacular with tapering rocks. We came to a church built between the river and the rock. Here we got out of the car and walked through the church, which dates from 1215 A. D., and came to another building with a carved stone roof which had the effect of stalactites. One of the local priests came to talk to us, and he invited us to look around the adjoining monastery. This, to my surprise, was actually a cave which was—so the priest told us—carved out of the rock by a single stonemason named Galdzag who spent his entire life working on its enlargement and on its elaborate decoration. A small alcove which adjoins the cave was formerly used for burials.

It was ancient-stone cold in the cave after the soft warmth of the Armenian countryside. I was lightly clad and tried hard not to show that I was shivering as the priest showed us round his domain, but Vahan noticed and draped his coat around my shoulders which was a great help.

"See," said the priest, pointing to one of the small windows, "the name of Galdzag is inscribed there." To one side of the church was a stone altar glittering with lighted candles.

"Here is where we celebrate mass," the priest explained, "and here is a place where you can sit down and get warm." (He had noticed too!) He pointed to an old-fashioned but amazingly efficient space-heater. I had wondered how worshippers managed to keep their minds on their prayers in such a chill place. The priest himself didn't seem to mind the cold. He was wearing a long black soutane with perhaps something warm under it. He was a very striking man, tall and strong, with thick silver hair and the pale blazing-blue eyes of a zealot in contrast with his deeply tanned face.

We took some photographs outside the church, thanked the priest for showing us around, and went back to the car. There on the roadside was an Armenian peasant woman selling sweets to passers-by. She was of outlandish proportions, weighing perhaps as much as three average Armenian men. She was straight out of Ben Jonson's "Bartholomew Fair", a whole-shire-of-butter of a woman in a short, tight-fitting dress of candy pink, a bright headscarf knotted low on her brow, her plump bare feet thrust into fluffy slippers of electric blue and purple and yellow. Her abundant flesh spilling over either side of her small wooden chair, she sat immobile as the rock of ages beside her rickety table of sugar sticks, her tree-trunk legs planted apart, her wide mahogany-brown shiny face impassive as the Sphinx. I gazed at her in delight. She was magnificent. She was Earth Mother. She was also, I had to remind myself, a Soviet citizen. As we drove away I looked back at her. Away in an earth-world of her own, she hadn't even turned her head.

We drove up, up and up into the foothills of the Caucasian mountains, the scenery becoming more and more breathtaking with every kilometre. I, who am so familiar with the natural splendours of Snowdonia in Wales, was left gasping as we drove round and round the mountains, climbing higher and higher. Mount Ararat towered above us looking like part of the clouds, coming ever closer as we neared the border with Turkey.

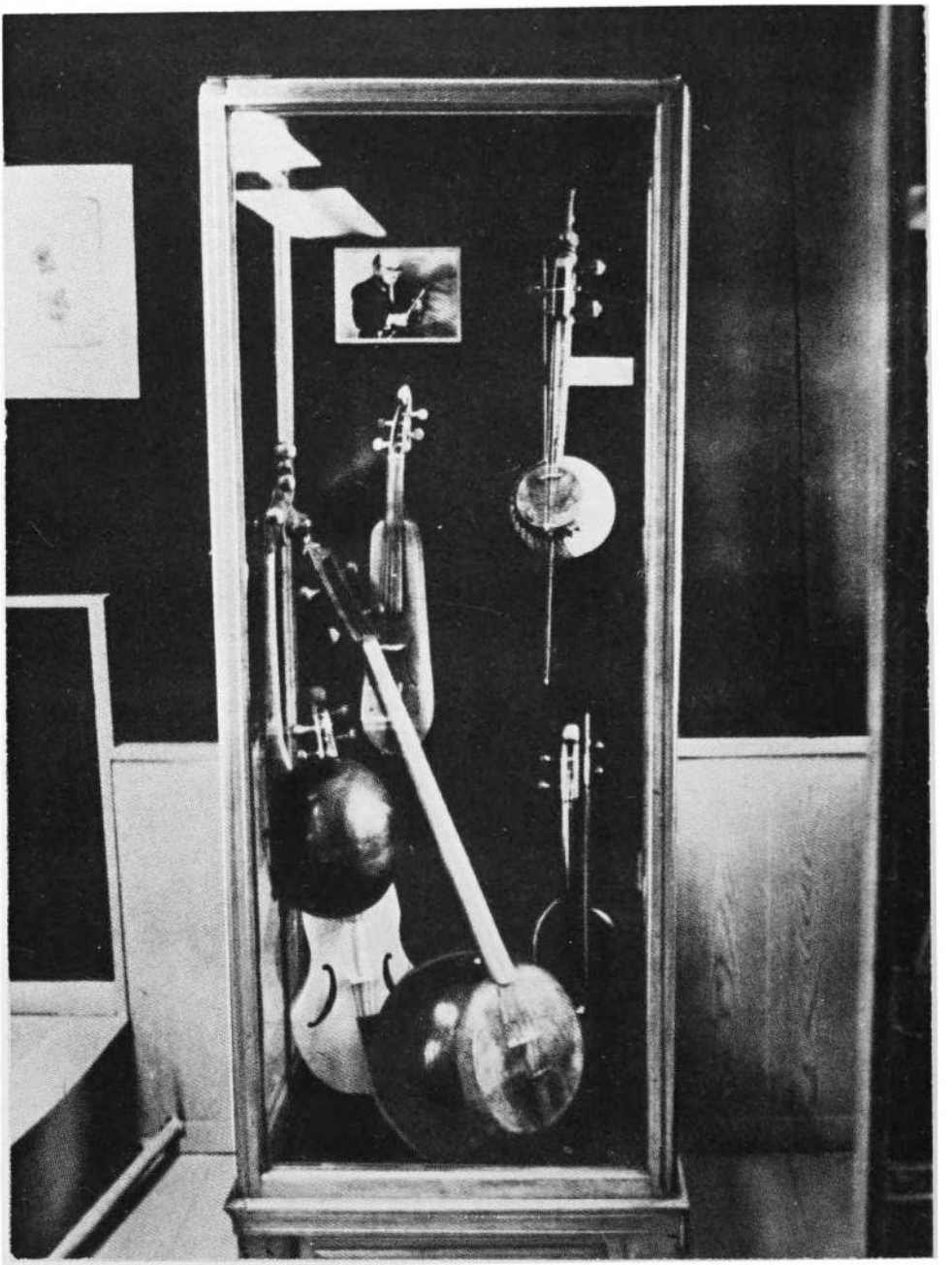
The Spendiarov Academic Opera
and Ballet Theatre in Yerevan

Both ancient and young, Armenia's capital city
is beautiful at any time of year

In the evening Lenin Square
is transformed into a festive spectacle
of water fountains, colour and music

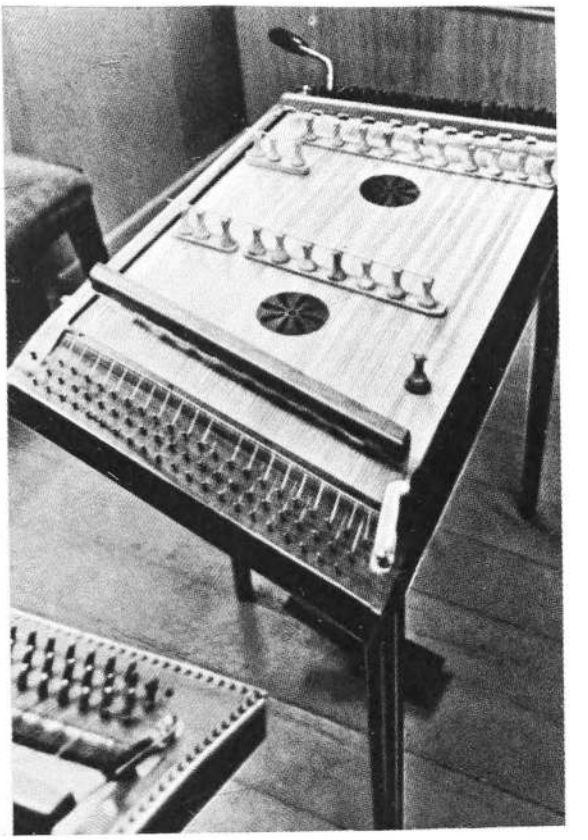
A scene from the Armenian opera *Anush*
by Armen Tigranyan

The Khachaturyan Concert Hall during
a performance celebrating the 80th anniversary
of the birth of this famous Armenian composer.
On stage: the State Symphonic Orchestra
and the State Academic Choir
of Armenia

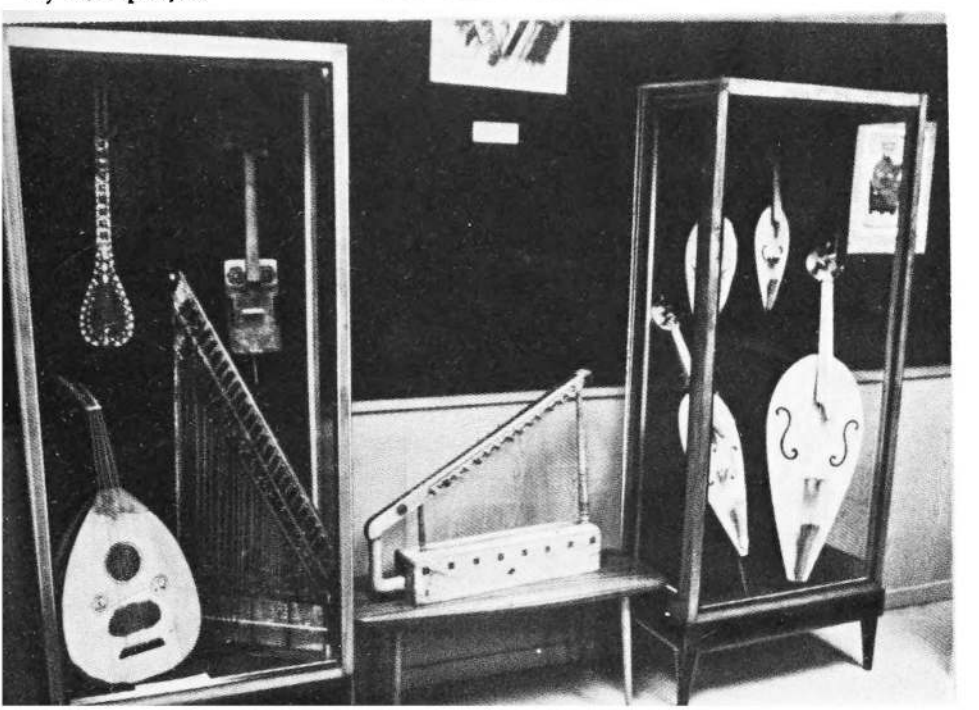


The Spendiarov Museum in Yerevan. Different types of *kyamancha* and *kyaman* musical instruments crafted by V. Buni and M. Khachatryan

The *santur*, an Armenian string-pizzicato folk musical instrument crafted by G. Papazyan



Examples of the west Armenian tambour crafted by G. Papazyan



Meeting some village dwellers
of Garni in Armenia

At the entrance to the Glinka Museum
of Musical Culture

"You need special permission to photograph Mount Ararat," said Sergei, "because it's over the border. I got it for you," he added with a grin, obviously enjoying my astonishment.

"Thank you," I replied. "The mountain isn't co-operating, though. Look at all that cloud and mist up there. It wouldn't make a good photograph, and it would take an artistic genius to capture it."

"You're right," he agreed, "but perhaps later when we've had lunch you will find the inspiration."

Much of the land through which we had driven had been under cultivation, and people in the valleys had been busily working in the fields. The main granary of Armenia is the Ararat Valley, where there is also extensive fruit growing both for the table and for the wine-making industry. The floor of the valley was a patchwork quilt of growing things—vines, apricots, melons, apples. Apples! Everywhere I went in Armenia there were apples, barrels of them, sacks of them, golden and rosy heaps of them on tables by the roadside where women were selling them.

"We grow green apples in Britain," I told my friends, for I hadn't seen any green ones in Armenia.

"Oh, we have green apples," they said, "but later in the year. Now they are yellow and red."

"We grow orange apples too," I said.

"*Orange* apples?" They were puzzled.

"Yes, they are called Cox's orange pippins. They are the most popular apples in Britain. Their juice is like wine."

We arrived at the restaurant high in the mountains. As he handed me out of the car Vahan said with a smile,

"Now you will taste Armenian wine. You will forget about your orange apples."

We sat down to a magnificent meal of typical Armenian foods. First there were hors d'oeuvres of salads, cold meats, beans, cheeses, and spicy Armenian sausage known as *sudzhukh*. Then a bottle of pink Armenian champagne was opened with a celebratory pop and a toast was drunk to the guest of honour—which was me on this occasion. As is customary when being toasted in Armenia, I was the last to set down my glass. The champagne was delicious and beautifully chilled. How many writers, I thought, have a toast drunk to them in *pink* champagne?

It smacks of Viennese operetta!

The toast is a time-hallowed and strictly observed custom in Armenia. One of the diners, usually the oldest or most distinguished man present, is elected *tamada* and it is his duty to preside over the table. He will think up all kinds of things to toast—his guests, friendship, the beauty of the land, the mountains, health and happiness. Strictly speaking, it is the custom to drain one's glass after each toast, but champagne is champagne, pink or not, and I have no great capacity for alcohol, so I drank all our toasts in sparkling mineral water, and hoped that my companions wouldn't mind, which they did not, I think.

The next course was set before us. It was a dish of Caucasian kebabs known as *khorovats*, with baked aubergines and sweet red peppers. There was also a dish of fried chicken with mixed oriental salads and pickles. It looked for all the world like a typical middle-eastern Jewish meal, pickled cucumbers and all. The Armenian bread, which is called *lavash*, was cut into thick slices from a large round flat-domed loaf and served with the meal.

"Try some Armenian brandy," said Sergei, pouring it out into tot-sized glasses. "A toast to your book, and to your musical journey through our land."

We drank to that. The brandy was fine and smooth and didn't burn the throat as it went down, but strong it was and I returned to mineral water for the succeeding toasts! The next course was a bowl of all kinds of fresh fruits, and a dish of salted nuts. While we were talking Vahan selected a red apple, sliced it carefully onto a plate and handed it to me. Where else in the world, I thought, do one's hosts cut up fruit for their guests? Various members of my family do it, but that doesn't count. This was different. This was part of Armenia's hospitality. I accepted the apple and was glad that Vahan hadn't chosen an orange for me, as I hadn't yet had an opportunity to practise eating them in the new way. I resolved to remedy this as soon as possible for, sooner or later I was certain, an Armenian was going to hand me a sliced orange and would expect me to deal with it.

Lunch in the mountains was a leisurely matter, interspersed with a dozen or so toasts, and the light had changed

by the time we left the restaurant and continued our drive. As we rounded to high hills we passed mountain lakes, pine forests, animals grazing in alpine meadows, fast mountain streams and waterfalls. In the incandescent air Mount Ararat, still diademed with clouds, was painted on the sky like an ancient faded Chinese water-colour. It was less photographable than ever and more awe-inspiring. Looking at it, I didn't find it difficult to understand why there is a legend that Noah built his Ark on Ararat's snowy summit when the rest of the world was engulfed by the Great Flood. The legend is that after the flood had subsided, Noah cultivated the first vines in Ararat's foothills. Archeologists have discovered evidence that wine was made on a large scale in this region as long ago as nine centuries B. C. Armenia must be the paradise of archeologists. The whole country is a living, breathing museum of ancient history.

* * *

I stood on the edge of a high green plateau and looked down and down through the radiant clear air to the river which lay at the bottom of a deep wide valley. The land was alive with rustling sound. Miles away in the trees some gigantic bird rose cawing into the vivid sky, its harsh voice ebbing into silence. A donkey, and then another, disappeared into the stony landscape. Floating up to me from the river came the flat faint tonk-tonk of goat bells. Nearby, one of the goatherd's sons, a boy of perhaps seven or eight years old, waited as his father herded home the goats to be milked. I looked at the boy and wondered what his future would be had be been born in the West, for he was one of the most beautiful human beings I have ever seen. Film stars and models have made fortunes in the West from faces less remarkable. I will never know for certain what the future holds for him but I know that if he is intelligent he will go to the University in Yerevan and perhaps become an engineer; or, if he is talented, he will go to a cultural establishment where his talent will be carefully nurtured; and if he is just an ordinary boy with the face of a Botticelli angel, perhaps he will go into industry and help his father with the goats in his spare time.

His grandmother, or was she his great grandmother—one couldn't tell—sat on a ledge of rock knitting a bright pink woollen sock. There she was with the backdrop of the mountain ranges of the Minor Caucasus around her, and she belonged to the ancient landscape. She saw me looking at the lovely child and smiled at me and said something in her own language. Vahan was on hand to translate. "The boy can milk a goat as well as his father," she had proudly told me. She sat there on her rock looking as her ancestors would have looked a thousand years ago. Her face was that of a typical old Armenian peasant, fine-lined and brown-papery, with dark eyes under beetling brows, nose hooking down to her mouth, grey hair in one long thin braid under a black headscarf.

What enormous changes the Soviet government has made in the life of her family. Now she lives in a good house in the village along the road, a village where walls are new and strong and where roofs are safe against the weather, and where poultry run clucking around whitewashed barnyards. She and her family wear sturdy shoes and clothes made of good cloth. They are healthy and obviously well fed. How had she and her people lived before Armenia became a Soviet Republic in 1920? Alexander Myasnikyan, the first Chairman of the Armenian Soviet of People's Commissars, described what Armenia was like when it became part of the Soviet Union.

"Soviet Armenia inherited a population of refugees and deprived people. It inherited a hundred thousand orphans. We will transform this valley of tears into a valley of roses."

Although the Soviet Union itself was suffering appalling difficulties and privations at that time, the Soviet State sent aid to Armenia in enormous quantities to restore the ravaged economy and revive the national culture. The Ukraine, the breadbasket of the Soviet Union, supplied grain and other produce, Rostov sent equipment for a milk factory, Azerbaijan sent oil, the textile workers of Ivanovo-Voznesensk sent the first looms to establish Armenia's textile industry. The oldest of these looms, which ceased to be in use many years ago, can now be seen in Yerevan's Museum of Revolution, which was opened in 1960.

During the decades of Soviet government more than six hundred industrial enterprises have been established in Armenia, the most developed being electrical engineering, instrument making and electronics. I thought of all this as I looked at this kindly, cheerful old woman placidly knitting her pink sock. I sat down on the rock beside her and she didn't mind Vahan taking some photographs of us. It was hard to guess her age but probably she was in her late seventies. One way or another she would have been a grown girl or even a young woman when her country became a Soviet Republic, so she would remember the time of hunger and suffering and hardship only too well. No wonder she looked so contented.

It had been a sweet and perfect spring day, and when the sunset came it was so still that the night didn't seem external at all. It was like being in an immeasurable room without a ceiling.

* * *

"Welcome to the House of Composers."

Edward Mirzoyan held out his hand to me. He introduced me to four other composers, Levon Astvatsatryan, M. Vartazaryan, T. Mansuryan, and Adam Khudoyan, and we all sat down in the large-windowed music studio on the first floor to discuss topics of mutual interest. First of all, Edward Mirzoyan told me something about the Union of Armenian Composers.

"We have a hundred and thirty members and Khudoyan here is our chairman. This house is subsidized by the State. It has two wings where we have flats and live with our families."

"The House of Composers has its own polyclinic for the use of composers and their families," said Levon, who could speak fluent French. "Medical care is free of charge as it is everywhere in the Soviet Union."

I was interested to hear of the cultural ties that Edward Mirzoyan personally had with Britain.

"My mother has been several times to the Edinburgh Festival," he told me. "It was she who introduced me to the strange and beautiful sound of the Scottish bagpipes, and I heard them myself when I went to Scotland."

He was highly amused when I told him that there are people outside Scotland who are not enamoured of the bagpipes and who have been known to refer to the instrument as "The Howling Haggis". I had then, of course, to go into the intricacies of what a Scottish haggis actually is, and I am not absolutely certain he believed me. It hadn't taken us more than a few minutes to discover that we shared a sense of humour. Still, the idea that a British writer who had come to the House of Composers to discuss music was now talking about a sheep's stomach stuffed with items not normally on an Armenian housewife's grocery list might have struck him as a rather gruesome British joke. All the same he seemed to me the sort of lively-minded man who would go out of his way to taste haggis the next time he visits Scotland. Who knows, he might even like it.

"I have other cultural ties with Britain," Mirzoyan told me. "I have been there many times, and I have met many of your best composers."

"Did you know Benjamin Britten?" I asked.

"Oh, yes," he replied, "I met him many times, also Michael Tippett, William Walton, and Vaughan Williams. Britain has many fine composers."

"Is their music popular in Armenia?"

"Yes, to a certain extent, but Britten is by far the most popular of the British contemporary composers."

"And who from former centuries?" I asked.

"Oh, Handel undoubtedly. Although he was German born, you claim him as British, don't you?"

"Yes, we do. He settled in England and became a naturalized British subject in 1726. He died in London and was buried in Westminster Abbey."

We went on to discuss many aspects of Armenian music and at one point Edward Mirzoyan went to the grand piano by the window and played one of his own waltzes. Then he played a record of Khachaturyan and, as I listened to the familiar music of the Violin Concerto my mind went back to that sad day in 1978 when Khachaturyan died at the age of seventy-five and all of musical Britain mourned this most loved (outside his own country) of Armenian composers. In 1939, the first year of the Second World War, Khachaturyan spent the spring and sum-

mer in Armenia studying the music and folklore and working on his ballet *Happiness*. During his childhood his mother used to sing Armenian folk songs, which made a profound impression on the gifted boy. He also heard wandering minstrels (*ashugi*) while playing in the streets of Tbilisi with his friends. Years afterwards the rhythms and melodies of these amateur musicians were to reappear in a more refined and developed form in his own music. Khachaturyan always said that the folk songs of Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan were the basis of his musical mentality.

"Khachaturyan was in Switzerland in 1965 when he met a very famous British man," said Edward Mirzoyan. "Do you know who that was?"

"Tell me."

"It was Charlie Chaplin. He was seventy-six then but he was still very lively and youthful. Khachaturyan knew that Chaplin had composed the music for some of his own films and asked him to play some of it. Chaplin went to the piano but managed, with the greatest charm, to wriggle out of playing for the great composer. Who could blame him?"

We discussed music and life and art and philosophy until it was time for me to go. Edward Mirzoyan rose and kissed my hand.

"I am so happy to have met you," he said, "I hope you will come again to Armenia."

"I hope so too," I said.

"And what is the next stage of your musical journey?" he asked.

"That is a surprise for Sonya," said Levon. "We are taking her there now."

"Let me give you a present so that you will remember us," said Edward Mirzoyan, and he gave me a record of music by three of his colleagues—L. Astvatsatryan, T. Mansuryan, and M. Vartazaryan.

"You can all be certain I'll remember you," I said. I thanked them and said goodbye, and then Levon and I went down to Sergei's car.

Soon we were driving out of Yerevan into the desert. Levon and I spoke in French.

"Is there something musical out here in the desert?" I asked him.

He smiled. "Yes," he said, "you will see."

I was intrigued but he wouldn't tell me. Sergei drove fast and at one point his car was overshadowed by an enormous bread lorry in front. He hooted to get it to move over and let him pass.

"In Britain we have a saying," I told him, "never argue with anything bigger than yourself."

Sergei laughed and hooted the lorry again. To my astonishment the drab-green leviathan meekly moved over to the right to let us pass. A flight of huge birds darkened the sky for a moment.

"Look," I pointed, "what are those birds?"

"They are cranes," said Levon. "Now we know it is spring."

I had never seen so many of these strange birds before and the sight of them lingered in my mind.

We arrived at our destination in the town of Sardarapat. There I saw the memorial complex which had been built in memory of the decisive battle which the Armenian people had fought against the invading Turks from May the 22nd to the 26th in 1918. It was precisely here that the Armenians, with only the most rudimentary weapons, had defended their land and defeated their enemies from across the border. The memorial park of Sardarapat was opened in May 1968, fifty years after the Armenian victory.

The entrance to the park is dominated by two gigantic stylized winged bulls made from red tufa. They stand with lowered horns on either side of a flight of shallow stone steps flanked by spikey desert grass. A long, low, oriental style building stands in the park, and behind it there are gardens in which tower huge eagles carved in blue basalt. This building, which is made of bright red tufa, houses the Museum of Armenian Musical Instruments which Levon and Sergei had brought me to see.

At the top of the steps there was a tall, modern style, open-work bell tower with nine bells. On each anniversary of the Armenian victory these bells peal out over the countryside. As I passed the bell tower I saw a wide square to the left of which was the museum. As I approached the building I saw that it was decorated with bas reliefs of charging winged horses, serpents, humans and birds.

First there was a ceremonial lunch in the nobly proportioned dining room. The director of the museum was there to welcome me, and I met several members of his staff. Then we all sat down to a banquet at the long dining table. It seemed that every possible item of Armenian cuisine was set before us that day. The table groaned under great platters of spicy fried chicken, kebabs, sausages, *dolmas* (minced meat and rice wrapped and cooked in vine leaves), and bowls of all kinds of green salads and hors d'oeuvres. I am told that Armenians use over three hundred varieties of greens, and many of them seemed to be on the table that day. There were tomatoes, fresh and baked, cucumbers, aubergines, red peppers, and dishes of pomegranates, oranges, grapes, apples, nuts and pickles. And of course there was the now familiar Armenian pink champagne, Armenian brandy, and sparkling Jermuk which many people consider to be Armenia's finest mineral water.

Dozens of toasts were made and drunk throughout the meal. Every few minutes we stood up and clinked glasses, looking into each other's eyes as we did so (this is very important) and we toasted everything which the director, who of course was the *tamada*, and his guests could think of. We toasted Armenia, we toasted each other, we toasted music and art and literature. Glasses were refilled and we toasted friendship, happiness, love.

Some of the guests round the table may have become a little merry but nobody actually became inebriated. In Armenia such a thing is considered to be the height of bad manners. The secret is to eat plenty and drink in moderation they say. I don't know, though. If I had drunk all those toasts in champagne or brandy, draining my glass after every one, I would not have been able to rise to my feet, so I was thankful for the mineral water which appears on every Armenian table.

After lunch two of the staff members showed me the museum's large collection of Armenian folk instruments. The echoing halls of the museum had symmetrically patterned marble floors and high arched ceilings decorated with carved bas reliefs of animals and birds. The instruments were beautifully displayed in glass cases. Some of the instruments were familiar to me, and some I had seen

before in the Spendiarov House but some were totally new to me. For instance, I discovered, to my surprise, that some of the smaller drums were actually covered with fish skin, salted and cured to make it durable and resonant. I was glad that it was possible to hear what some of the stranger instruments sounded like. Tape recordings have been made of them for interested visitors, and all that the staff members had to do was to press a switch by the side of the appropriate glass case.

I hope that one day I will be able to return to Sardarapat as it has more items of musical interest than can easily be seen and studied in a single afternoon.

* * *

On my last day in Yerevan the city was a pale honey-gold in the lustrous spring light. After the morning spent writing up my notes I went to a quiet restaurant for lunch. The waiter set before me a plate of rectangular shaped crunchy pancakes filled with finely minced meat and herbs, together with a glass of *matsun*, which is the Armenian form of keffir. It is slightly more solid than keffir but not quite so solid as yoghurt.

There was one place I absolutely didn't want to miss and that was the Armenian Museum of Children's Art which wasn't far from my hotel. Though time was flying and I had a plane to catch and I hadn't quite finished my packing, I got a taxi and paid a fairly brief visit to the museum. Perhaps when I next visit Armenia I'll be able to spend more time in this fascinating place.

The gallery has a collection of over a hundred thousand children's drawings and paintings. As well as the regular exhibitions of Armenian children's work, there have been exhibitions of works done by children from other Soviet republics, Eastern and Western Europe (including Britain), Canada, the United States, India and Japan. I was fascinated by one child's vision of Armenia's mountainous landscape. Against a background of Gauguin-green fields and indigo sky, the mountains rear like white mounds of ice cream garnished with blackcurrant and strawberry jam. Did the young artist know, I wondered, that he (or she) had created a landscape luscious enough to eat.

Another enchanting work was a market scene with Lowry-like figures and animals in profile, each separate from its fellows, dotted busily all over the painting which was rich with dark hues and sudden bright red and white. One of the paintings was of Armenia's wild fauna including one of those leopards that I had heard about. Had the artist actually seen one I wondered and if so, in which region of Armenia had he (or she) come upon it? There was a tapestry-like painting by an older child which depicted an Armenian family dressed in bright national costume. A richly patterned carpet covers the wooden plank floor, and the walls are adorned with woven hangings. I thought that this was one of the loveliest paintings in the exhibition.

All the paintings displayed the children's love of rich bright colour, their love of wild and domestic animals, the countryside and their families. I looked around in some haste, one eye on my watch, and wished that I could see everything at my leisure, but it wasn't possible, not that day anyway. I had to finish my packing and get to the airport, because that evening I was going to fly to Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan, and then on to Alma Ata, Kazakhstan's capital, right down south near the Chinese border in Soviet Central Asia.

Chapter 4

LAID UP IN THE SOVIET UNION

"The best-laid schemes
o' mice an' men
Gang aft agley."

(Robert Burns)

Did ever poet write a truer word than Scotland's national bard! I had planned my musical tour of the Soviet Union so that it would proceed without a single hitch, but for all that I never made it to Alma Ata. That will have to wait until my next visit to the Soviet Union. Where I did make it was into one of Armenia's leading hospitals with a formidable case of anaemia. It was a condition which I had been aware of for several months before I went to the Soviet Union, but had been too busy to place in the hands of a doctor. Well, now I was literally surrounded by doctors who worked assiduously to save my life. Due to their care and skill, they did indeed save it.

I lay in a pleasant room by myself; the sun was shining, the day was warm and peaceful, and I thought that if I absolutely had to be ill, there could not possibly be a sweeter place than Armenia in which to be so. My room, which had a private bathroom leading off it, had gold curtains framing big, double-glazed windows. It was equipped with a portable television and a radio. A full-sized refrigerator was built into the wall opposite my bed; above my head there was a telephone, and near to hand was a series of buttons—a bell to call a nurse, a button for the bedside light, one for the main light, and a third for a night light. My room, in other words, contained everything possible for my comfort and convenience.

It was the beginning of one of the happiest weeks of my life. Happy in hospital? I can only say that I was. During my stay in Armenia I had become familiar with the hospitality of its people, which is justifiably world-famous, but the treatment I received during my week in hospital there was something more than hospitality. Too

weak, at first, to raise my head I was treated exactly like a baby, I was literally rocked in people's hands, I was handled as delicately as though I were made of rarest porcelain, my head was lifted from the pillow by the softest hands so that I could drink. This wasn't just a medical team doing its job, this was the profoundest kind of caring; these were people who knew that I'd been taken ill during a tour of their country, that I'd been gathering material for a book and wanted only to continue my work and my journey, that I was a foreigner and therefore must above all be made to feel welcome.

The nurses having laid me gently in bed, they and the kitchen staff started carrying in trays of food with which they packed the refrigerator from top to bottom. A table in the corner of my room nearest to my bed was completely covered with food. First they put there an enormous bowl of beautiful fruit, huge butter-coloured apples with rosy cheeks, oranges, pomegranates, tangerines, apricots, green grapes and black grapes. Then they brought a loaf of Armenian bread, a large glass jug of *matsun*, a jar of apricot conserve, a dish of butter, a big wedge of cheese, a jar of *smetana*, and a bowl of mixed salad.

Then the drinks were brought in. I lay there watching in bewilderment while they packed the door-shelves of the refrigerator with every kind of fruit juice imaginable—pomegranate, orange, apple, pear, apricot, blackcurrant, grape, melon, plum, and—if you can believe me—banana juice. I wondered why anyone would prefer to drink a banana rather than eat it. Three kinds of mineral water went into the refrigerator together with tins of evaporated and condensed milk. When absolutely no more could be crammed in, the nurses and kitchen staff applied themselves to my bedside table which was soon covered with assorted bottles of fruit juice and mineral water together with several thin glass tumblers, a plate of Armenian "Lame Bears" and a big slab of chocolate.

I lay in bed quietly watching all this activity and wondering what it was all about, but I had to wait until someone who could speak one of my languages came to my room before I could find out. Eventually one of the doctors, Eleonora, came to see me. She had worked for several years in Algeria and could speak fluent French.

"The nurses and kitchen staff have packed this room with food," I said to her. "Is it for a party?"

Eleonora looked at me in astonishment.

"It is for you," she said. "You must eat as much as you can so that you will regain your blood and your strength."

It was my turn to look astonished.

"But," I protested, "there is enough food and drink in this room for four or five people. You can't possibly expect one person to manage all this. Look in the refrigerator, look at that table in the corner."

"I know about it," she said, "you see we don't know your tastes so we arranged for you to have many different kinds of food and drink until we find out what you like."

"I've travelled so much about the world that I've learned to eat almost anything," I said.

"But you must like some foods more than others," she replied, "and we'd like you to eat what you like best. It is for your health. You must eat as much as you can. Do you think you could eat something now?"

"I'm sure I couldn't," I said, "I have no appetite at all."

"Perhaps I can tempt you to something," Eleonora said. "We have nice food in Armenia."

"Oh, I know that."

"Well then, would you like some fruit juice?"

"To please you, I'll try some," I replied, "but I couldn't eat anything."

"You have a wide choice. You can have any kind of fruit juice. What about pomegranate?"

"Why not," I said, "I've never tried it."

Eleonora took a bottle from the refrigerator and poured me a glass of dark-dark liquid. I tried it and it tasted dark too, strong and rich and dark as treacle.

"There," I said, "I've managed some of it, but it's strong stuff. I've never heard of pomegranate juice before."

"You haven't drunk much of it, Sonya, perhaps you'd like something lighter. Apricot juice perhaps?"

"Eleonora, I really couldn't manage anything more at the moment."

"Alright, but promise me you'll try to eat something later. You've eaten nothing all day."

"I promise I'll try."

"Good. What would you like? You only have to say and we'll bring it to you. You can order anything you like."

"Goodness," I said, "this isn't like a hospital."

"Is it different in Britain?"

"Well, let's put it this way," I paused, "the food in British hospitals is good but it's plain and they don't supply patients with fresh fruit. That has to be brought in by relatives and friends. And one doesn't usually have a lot of choice; one or two alternatives perhaps."

"In Armenia we try to give patients what they like; we think it's better for them. Tell me, what would you like to eat later?"

"Must I eat anything today? I can't keep my head up."

"One of the nurses will help you. You did promise to try."

"So I did." I smiled, "You're a hard woman, Eleonora."

"If I were not we'd never get you well. Now what would you like? What about grilled trout? That's easy to eat."

"Alright, I'll try."

"And what about some salad with it?"

"Salad? Yes, alright."

"And you'll drink a glass of *smetana*?" she suggested.

I laughed.

"I said you were a hard woman, Eleonora. I'll do a deal with you. I'll try the trout and salad if you'll let me off the *smetana*."

"Don't you like it?"

"It's not that. It's just too heavy at the moment."

"Alright. I'll ask a cook to prepare some trout for you."

"Just one small one, please."

"I'll get her to cook several," Eleonora said firmly. "It's nice hot or cold."

She stood up briskly and smiled at me.

"See you later," she said, and bustled away.

The doctors were on the wards in the mornings, but after about midday they had all gone to their rooms to write up their reports. It was then that I had a football crowd in my room, for nearly all the patients from the other wards on our floor came to see me. The first two days I was too weak to get out of bed or even to sit up. I noticed very little of what was going on outside my

room. Soon, however, after some medication and treatment, I felt slightly better. I could at least get out of bed and walk slowly around my room (holding on to the furniture), but soon had to lie down again. On that second day I did begin to notice people walking in the corridor past my room because the door was fitted with a large glass panel. When I was lying flat I could only see the tops of white hats and dark heads moving past, but when I was propped up on two pillows I could see individuals. The hospital staff were the wearers of the white hats and the dark heads belonged to the other patients.

Word had spread like wildfire around our hospital floor that a foreign patient had been brought in and had a room to herself. So far no one had been able to talk to her except doctor Eleonora with whom she spoke in French although she was actually a Brit. Everyone wanted to know more about the crazy foreign patient who kept the windows open day and night (!), who drank fruit juice and mineral water *ice-cold* straight from the refrigerator (imagine such a thing so early in the year), and who didn't eat enough to keep a bird alive.

Curiosity was rampant. The other patients would stroll past my door and try not to look as though they were peering in at me. On the second day, after the doctors had gone off the wards, I smiled at someone who came strolling past. Instantly she was in my room and was soon joined by others, and still others until my room was milling with people, all of them other patients wearing, like me, pink hospital dressing gowns. We soon realised that we had a language problem. Armenian was their first language, Russian their second, which they did not use frequently. On that second day there was no one who could speak any Western European language. But we managed somehow, mainly in Russian and sign language. There are always ways of communicating.

They had learned from Eleonora that I was a British writer touring the Soviet Union to examine the culture, and that I was writing a book about Soviet musical life. They were fascinated but it wasn't until the following day when Nara, who spoke a little English, was admitted to the hospital that they were able to bombard me with questions. Nara sat on my bed and everyone let fly.

"Sonya, have you been to our Opera House?"
"Have you seen our Hall of Chamber Music?"
"And the museum of Spendiarov?"
"Did you see the Hands monument from Carrara?"
"And the 'In Defence of Peace' monument?"
"Sonya, have you seen Mount Ararat?"
"Have you tasted Armenian champagne?"
"Where were you staying?"
"Will you teach us some English?"
"Yes, please, teach us some English."
"Teach us now, please."

So I did. The lesson was in full flight when Eleonora bustled in. Eleonora never walked anywhere, she bustled.

"Now, now, girls, that's enough," she shooed everybody out. "Sonya must rest."

"I like to see them," I said.

"Yes, but they will tire you."

They all left my room but as soon as the doctors went off the wards they were back. The enormous language barrier was clearly a challenge to them. They kept hurling themselves against it trying to crack it, to get through it, like birds against a thick wall of glass. It was a formidable barrier, but they didn't stop trying to penetrate it, because they wanted to be friends with me. As they got to know me, Sonya changed to Sonetchka (little Sonya) the informal version of my name. No one had called me that since my grandparents died.

It was a happy week. Armenia is a happy land. Everyone at the hospital was helpful and friendly, and there was a lot of laughter. The whole place had a cheerful atmosphere, and as I got to know people, several characters began to emerge. There was Nina, a young probationer, whose primary task was to see that I had whatever I needed and to fly for a nurse or a doctor whenever she thought it necessary. She was a big, bright-faced peasant girl, pretty as a red rose, with dark eyes and hips as wide as a barn door. She was what in Britain is called a fine strapping girl, and she had masses of brown frizzy hair under a white headcloth which did not quite restrain it. Nina was the one person in that hospital who wasn't immediately relaxed in my company, or to put it another way, she was absolutely terrified of the awesome responsibility which

had been placed upon her—to watch over a foreign patient who could not speak a word of Armenian (she could speak no Russian), who was scarcely able to sit up in bed, who kept the windows open day and night (that *really* dismayed her) and whose hands were not even strong enough to peel a breakfast egg, as indeed my hands were not for the first two days.

Nina came on duty the second day I was there, and when she realised that I couldn't speak her language, her pretty eyes became wide with apprehension. When I realised that she couldn't understand a word of Russian, I accepted the challenge. Many people in Armenia can and do speak Russian, but I was to learn that people who came from peasant families tended to know only Armenian. Nina was a nice girl, conscientious and careful at her work.

When I put out my hand to my bedside table for some mineral water she would rush to pick up the glass and hold it to my lips while supporting my head with her other hand. At first I was glad of her help. But on my third day, when I was able to drink without assistance, Nina still insisted on doing everything for me. I was soon able to get out of bed and walk to the bathroom without holding on to the furniture, but no sooner did I stir than she was right there helping me on with my dressing gown, putting my mules on my feet, supporting each step I took with her strong arm. On the third day I made sign language to her and spoke in English.

"Look, Nina," I said, "I can get out of bed. See, I can put on the dressing gown and the slippers. *Khorosho*?"

She only looked nervous and carried on as before. In the bathroom I picked up a comb. She took it from me and drew it through my hair. I'm certain she would have liked to have brushed my teeth for me, but didn't quite dare to take the toothbrush from my hand. She did, however, pick up the toothpaste and squeezed some onto the brush. Smiling, I pushed her out of the bathroom and locked the door while I took a shower. When I opened the door again she was hovering anxiously an inch away from it. She had closed the windows in my room and as I made to open them again she leaped forward and shook her head, her eyes full of apprehension. She made a pan-

tomime of shivering and then fastened the buttons of my dressing gown right up to my neck. It was a gloriously warm and sunny day, it was a wonderful Armenian spring. But I didn't want to worry her so I left the windows closed until she took her eye off me for a few moments.

I sat down on my bed and Nina unbuttoned my dressing gown and hung it up. Then she took my mules off my feet and stowed them tidily away, although I was perfectly able to do this myself and she perfectly well knew it. She gently lifted my feet onto the bed, smoothed the pillow and pushed me carefully back onto it. Then she drew the sheet over me and piled on two thick blankets, tucking me up like an Egyptian mummy. All I wanted was some fresh air and to keep cool! But I had to use diplomacy with Nina. She was terrified that somebody would think that she wasn't doing her job properly, or that I would become ill and she would be blamed.

She was a sweet girl but she was too afraid of me to smile at me. I could see that she was tense and nervous all the time she was with me, afraid lest a situation arise that she couldn't handle. I tried everything I could think of to make her relax, but I know that at first she simply didn't think of me as a person, I was just a frightening responsibility.

I tried offering her fruit, cakes, sweets but this only provoked a reaction of alarm.

"Have an apple, Nina," I said on the third day, and put one into the pocket of her white uniform.

She looked appalled, drew it out, and put it back in the fruit bowl, mutely shaking her head. Then she put some black grapes on a plate and offered them to me. To please her I took the plate and ate some.

"These are nice," I said, and offered her the plate. She backed away from it, left the room and came back with more grapes although there were two large bunches of them in the fruit bowl. I sighed, but resolved to persevere.

My room and the bathroom were kept squeaky clean by women who worked in day and night shifts. The sheets and pillow cases were changed every day and the floor was attacked, first with straw brooms and then with a bumping roaring monster of a floor polisher. Every-

thing in my room was dusted twice a day and the mirrors and windows and glass panels were shined up until they sparkled. Nina changed my drinking glasses twice a day, filling them with fresh, unchilled fruit juices and mineral water. She didn't approve of my habit of drinking these things ice-cold straight from the refrigerator.

With all this changing and cleaning and polishing going on there inevitably came a point each day when there was absolutely nothing more for Nina to do in my room. She would tweak the bedclothes straight, tidy my pillows, rearrange my flowers, and then look around anxiously for the slightest speck of dust. When even she realized that not one was to be found, she would perch uneasily on the edge of a chair and stare at me with solemn eyes. At my slightest move she would leap to her feet to *do* something for me. It went on like this for several days and then one morning I happened to sneeze and she seized a tissue and rushed to my side and tried to blow my nose for me like a clild. I burst out laughing and smacked her bottom and gave her a piece of chocolate and she had to laugh then and that broke the ice at last. What a relief it was to see her pretty face break into a smile. She enjoyed nursing me after that and she even learned one or two words of English to please me.

There was a tiny, doll-like nurse called Anna who went from formally addressing me as "tovarich" (comrade) when she first came on duty, to calling me Sonetchka less than two hours later. By that time too, of course, I was calling her Annechka. There was something about that hospital which demolished formal barriers between strangers very quickly. It had, I am sure, a lot to do with the friendly, easy-going nature of the Armenian people themselves. They are adorable. They have the secret of happiness, and where could that possibly be more needful than in a hospital?

Annechka had an attribute as a nurse which endeared her to me and which, I hope, will take her far in her profession. Incredibly she could give an absolutely painless injection. All the doctors and nurses in the hospital who tended me had gentle hands and their injections, which I needed several times a day, did not sting much but when Annechka gave me one I could not feel it at all. She had a

lovely sense of humour too. Her tiny face under its spiky gamin haircut would break suddenly into a gap-toothed grin at one of my funnies. It is strange how humour can get through even the most formidable language barrier.

One thing I found particularly endearing about the medical staff is that nearly everyone called everyone else by their first name. Even the probationers called the doctors Ivan, Maxim, Grigor or whatever their name was. Only the cleaners were slightly more formal and addressed those in authority as, for instance, Ivan Borisovich or Grigor Alexeyevich and so forth. Some of them called me Sonya Davidovna (my father's name being David). The only person I met who was formally addressed by absolutely everyone was the head of the department, a kindly, buxom mother-figure with a sweet expression and a gentle manner.

A dozen or so patients came into my room one day and tried to ask me something in Armenian. Baffled, I shook my head whereupon one of the women squawked "tuk-tuk-tuk" imitating a chicken and flapping her arms, and somebody else clucked "waak-waak" turning round and round in circles. It was screamingly funny. None of us could stop laughing.

"Chicken," I gasped, wiping away tears of mirth.

"Cheek-en," they chorused. But that wasn't all of it. They were clearly trying to ask me something and I was nearly certain that it was would I eat some chicken if it was cooked for me. This was confirmed when someone else indicated that she wanted to borrow a pen and my notebook which I gave her. The sketch she drew produced more shrieks of laughter from us all. It was a hen with oversize feet and far too many toes standing, feathers and all, in an enormous black frying pan. My eyes were streaming with laughter when Annechka and Nina came into my room to find out what all the mirth was about. When Annechka saw the chicken in the frying pan she fell around the room laughing. Even Nina couldn't stop giggling.

"Fried chicken," I said, when I was able to speak.

"Fry cheek-en."

"Frying pan," I said, pointing to the sketch.

"Fry–eenk–pen."

They then told me how to say fried chicken in Armenian, and when I had got it right they departed, still laughing, to have their meal, and my fried chicken duly arrived (*sans* feathers). The only problem was that the kitchen had sent up enough chicken to feed about six people, and that wasn't everything on the big tray by any means. There were little brown spindle-shaped things which turned out to be an Armenian miracle with mashed potatoes rolled in breadcrumbs and fried. They were absolutely delicious, hot or cold. There were three kinds of Armenian salad greens none of which I had ever tasted before. The most remarkable of these tasted of aniseed of all things, another tasted not unlike British watercress but not so pungent, and the third had a delicate elusive flavour which defies description. All were small-leaved plants on long thin stalks. The tray also contained a glass of *matsun* and there was the inevitable *smetana.* They lived in hope though I could never drink much *smetana* at a time, so rich and heavy it is. It is really a meal in itself. I remember my grandfather used to eat bowls of curd cheese covered with *smetana* liberally sprinkled with salt and pepper, a meal deservedly still popular in the Soviet Union. The tray also bore a plate of Armenian bread, some salty Armenian cheese, and a big orange sliced the way Armenians like to do it. Nina hurried in and scanned the tray anxiously and disappeared only to return a few moments later with a small plate. She had spotted a tiny area of tray under the welter of dishes of food. She put down the plate and covered the offending gap. She had brought some big black olives.

"Thank you, Nina," I said, and looked at the tray by my bed. There was more than enough food on it to feed me for a week and this was just one meal. Well, I did my best and it was all delicious but I hardly made a hole in that Gargantuan meal. Nina sat beside my bed, her face a mask of tragedy. She cut a breast of chicken into bite-sized pieces and mutely implored me to eat some more. I couldn't refuse her, she tried so hard to look after me. I ate what I could and when she saw that I was at least trying, she sank into a chair in relief. I had learned the Armenian word for "later"—a useful word to know with Nina around. I pointed to the tray.

"Later," I promised her.

She nodded and smiled. I had become a person to her and she really liked me.

The little old Armenian babushka called Herignaz was adorable. She had a round and shining face, brown as a nut, and twinkling black curranty eyes. She was always smiling her gummy smile (she usually forgot to wear her dentures), and I was happy when she came on duty on the evening cleaning shift because there was such an aura of sweetness and wholesomeness about her. She was the archetypal grannie. There were many occasions during my stay in Armenia when I regretted not being able to speak the Armenian language. At no time did I regret it more than when Herignaz came to my room. The first she saw me I was lying in bed, flat on my back. She was silent for clearly she'd been told that I couldn't speak her language. And it soon became clear to me that she didn't know a word of Russian. She was so obviously an Armenian country woman who had never needed it. She came into my room that first day with her mop, broom and dusters and stood beside my bed, smiling down at me.

I liked her at once. We liked each other at once although, all the time I knew her we hardly exchanged a word. We communicated (very successfully) with smiles and sign language and offerings, on both sides, of pieces of chocolate and sweets. She showed her affection for me in many ways. Before she bade me goodnight she would make the sign of the cross over me with her head bowed for a few moments in prayer. I'm sure she was convinced that it would cure whatever ailed me. Whenever she did this I would put up my hand and stroke her round and shining face and she would nod and smile and go quietly about her work.

Sometimes I would be taking a shower when she came on duty and at such times, seeing my bed unoccupied, she would remake it as comfortably as she knew how. After a day or two in hospital I was able enough to do this for myself. Something in me was reluctant to let someone so much older than myself minister to me in this way. It should have been the other way round, I thought, for she was the grannie and grannies should be

cared for. But I knew that these self-imposed tasks were a demonstration of an affection which she could not put into words, so I would sit on a chair and wait and let her do it. And when my bed was made she would turn back the sheet. I would lie down and she would tuck me in carefully and lay her hand on my head. Then she would make her blessing over me, as doubtless she did with her own children and grandchildren.

She was delighted when I learned her name and would nod and smile and say Sonya, and sometimes Sonechka. I would try to informalize her name and call her Herichka, which made her laugh out loud. She had a most delightful cackling laugh. The air was very dry in Armenia and, accustomed as I am to the moister air of Britain, I was always thirsty, especially on very warm days. On one particularly warm evening I wanted to drink some milk from the refrigerator and seeing that, for once, there was no fresh milk there, I took out what I thought was a tin of evaporated milk (the label was in Armenian) and began to open it. When diluted, chilled evaporated milk is a nice cold drink. Herignaz gently took the tin opener from my hand. She wanted to do it for me. When the tin was opened I discovered to my dismay that it contained sticky-sweet thick condensed milk. I gagged at the thought of it as Herignaz smilingly held it out to me, but I knew I had to take some for there was no way that I could explain to her that I'd thought it was going to be another kind of milk. But when one is very thirsty, how does one face condensed milk?

I took the tin and looked around the room hoping, without much hope, for a brainwave and then I actually had one. Mineral water! I took a bottle and mixed some with the milk and it made such a nice bubbly drink (it was sparkling mineral water) that I made two glasses of my new invention and offered one to Herignaz. Quite obviously she had never tasted such a concoction before and neither, for that matter, had I. I'm not sure she liked it very much either but she drank some to please me. I have sometimes wondered since what it is that Armenians actually do with condensed milk. They don't drink their tea with milk, and they don't seem to spread it on their bread, and what else *is* there to do with condensed milk?

The fact of my presence in the hospital soon went round the other wings of the building and anyone who had any English or French at all would come to my room to talk to me—about music, ballet, art, literature, politics, linguistics, current affairs, the Soviet and British media of communication, travelling, philosophy, ancient history, modern history, indoor gardening—anything and everything.

One day one of the doctors from the maternity wing came to my room, and I found that his English was astonishingly fluent. He had, he told me, studied in Britain for two years, staying during that time with a British family. We discussed politics and current affairs and the social services of both our countries. During our conversation I told him that I was surprised to see a woman of the age well into her seventies still working. He explained that "in our country, if people over the age of retirement want to have a job they can have one, there is plenty of work in the Soviet Union. Women of this age are often lonely. Their children are grown up and married, and sometimes their husbands have died, so they want to come back to work for the sake of company as much as anything else, but they also like to feel they are being useful. The State can always find little jobs for elderly people who want them, nothing too strenuous of course."

I thought this a very good idea. Certainly Herignaz's job was not a hard one, and she obviously enjoyed the company of the other members of the hospital staff and the patients. Apart from my own grandmother I have never seen a happier old lady in my life.

I hadn't been in the hospital for twenty-four hours before I discovered that all the medical staff—doctors, nurses, surgeons, anesthetists and technicians—wore the same tall, round, white linen hats low on the forehead and concealing most of the hair. Certainly those hats are hygienic, but what a problem I had at first to distinguish who was what. The same hats were worn by men and women. It took me a little while to sort everybody out, and then I had to try to recognise them again when I happened to see them without their hats. Annechka clearly had an uneasy relationship with her hat. She would come on duty and her hat would be on straight,

just skimming her eyebrows. But she was a hard worker and as the day wore on her hat would get more and more askew until much of her urchin hair would be poking out of it. Sometimes she couldn't be bothered with it and simply left it in the staff room. Some of the nurses looked immaculately turned out all the time, but little Annechka wasn't like that. But what a nurse she was, and that is what counts.

Dr. Abgaryan was one of the doctors who saved my life. He was on duty almost every day of my week in the hospital and he looked after me with meticulous care. Communication with him was no problem because he could speak some English. Through him and through Eleonora the rest of the hospital staff were able to communicate with me and I with them. Dr. Abgaryan was a man of rare good humour even in a good-humoured country like Armenia. He was a busy man and worked tirelessly, but he always carried an aura of cheerfulness around with him. When I needed to have transfusions he attended to it himself, putting the thick needle straight into a vein on the inside of my arm as gently as anyone could. Like Eleonora and the nurses who tended me, he bewailed my small appetite.

"You must eat more," he said, "to regain your strength. Your blood is far too thin. You have only half the haemoglobin you should have."

"I haven't a very large appetite," I explained, "but I eat enough for my needs, really I do."

He shook his head ruefully.

"The British and the French are well known in our country for their small appetites."

"Yes, I have heard that."

"I will ask Angelica to bring you something nice when she comes on duty in a few minutes."

"But I have already eaten something," I protested, but I might have saved my breath because he didn't take that seriously at all.

"You haven't tried Armenian chocolate cake with cream," he smiled. "We got some especially for you. You must have calories as well as vitamins. I am sure you will like our chocolate cake."

I was certain that I would. I can resist many things in

this world, but where chocolate cake with cream is concerned I am lost. It duly arrived with a glass of cold milk—two big dark wedges on a rosy plate. Angelica put the tray on my bedside locker and hastened away. Angelica was always in a hurry. It was the most luscious cake I have ever tasted. It had ten or more thin layers, each one gooey with thick fresh cream, the top covered with a layer of delicious smooth chocolate icing. Angelica reappeared and immediately raised her eyebrows at the remaining slice on the plate.

"Later," I said in Armenian.

"Promise?" she demanded in Russian.

I nodded and smiled. Nobody in this world has ever needed to insist on my eating chocolate cake, as she was to find out.

Angelica was another character, although nobody ever called her by her full name. She was always known as Angik. A fine and experienced nurse, more mature than the others in charge of me, she was a terror for strict discipline. One couldn't get away with anything with her.

On one particular morning I got out of bed and went to have a shower. When I emerged from the bathroom Angik was standing by my bed. My dressing gown was on its hook by the door and my mules were under my bedside locker. She didn't say anything. Her face said it all. That was the first time she caught me and it became something of a game. The windows of my room overlooked the big central courtyard of the hospital. I liked to lean on the sill of the open window and see all the comings and goings. There was always something happening during the day. One bright day I had been leaning for some time on the window-sill happily minding everyone else's business, when there was a tap on my shoulder and there was Angik looking meaningfully down at my bare feet. She jerked her head towards the door where, of course, my dressing gown was hanging. I went over and put it on and stuffed my feet into my mules. Angik had a perpetual twinkle in her eye which she kept (or thought she did) firmly under control. This time, though, as she's caught me for the *second* time, she couldn't suppress a smile and, having put one over me, she rammed home her advantage. She poured out a large glass of *sme-*

tana which she handed to me and blandly waited until I had drunk every drop, and then she handed me a huge rosy apple which she had cut into slices while I had been struggling with all that *smetana.* Again she waited impassively until I had finished every slice on the plate. Alright, Angik, I thought, that round was yours.

When she was on duty I had an ongoing battle to get enough fresh air. Angik didn't believe in such a thing at that time of the year. She would hasten into my room, look at the open windows in my room and in the bathroom, shake her head in disbelief and close them with a snap. It was nice when she was off duty because I could sit in a lovely draught. The days would start fair and warm and still and then every afternoon a breeze would blow up and I would throw open the windows so that I could enjoy it. Angik wouldn't have it, and she was right. One must be careful of the climate in Armenia. The country lies at a high altitude, its average elevation is about fifteen hundred metres above sea level and the atmospheric and barometric pressures are different from those in other lands. The refreshing spring breeze was not what it seemed, and Armenians are wary of it. It is perfidious and can chill you to the bone without your being aware of it. I found that out the hard way!

Nara was an engineering student, a patient in the ward next to my room. She could speak a little English, which improved enormously as she used it over the days we knew each other. When Eleonora and Dr. Abgaryan were off the wards, Nara was my communication link with everyone else on our floor. She enjoyed this role immensely and spent a lot of time in my room. She was very homesick but her family doctor wanted her to stay in hospital for the last twelve days of her pregnancy to make sure the baby was absolutely save. Nara would pace up and down, up and down the hospital corridors, restless and apprehensive, but she always cheered up whenever she could talk to her husband. There wasn't a window in her ward which opened onto the courtyard, but my windows did and so, at a prearranged time, outside visiting hours of course, Nara would come to my room and say "May I?" and then do a "Romeo and Juliet" out of my bathroom window with her husband in the courtyard below. The

hospital staff didn't like patients doing that, Nara told me, but no one ever caught her at it.

One day Nara looked at the bottle of mineral water on my bedside table.

"Don't drink that," she said, "I will bring you something better."

"But this is nice," I said. Nara shook her head.

"I asked my parents to bring you some Jermuk. It is the best in Armenia." She went to her own ward and came back with a big bottle of Jermuk. It did indeed taste wonderful.

"Please thank your parents, Nara, it is most kind of them."

"Don't mention it," she replied, "it is their pleasure."

I handed her three pomegranates.

"Please give these to your parents and keep one yourself."

"No, no," she protested, "they are for you."

"But it is *my* pleasure," I insisted. She smiled.

"Oh, alright. As you say."

Armenia's boundless hospitality was further demonstrated by a phone call I received from a complete stranger.

"My name is Hripsimeh," she introduced herself, "I am a student and I am learning English. I heard that you are a British writer in hospital in our country and I am phoning to say welcome to Armenia."

"How kind of you," I said.

"Not at all," she replied, "we like guests in our country to feel welcome."

"Everyone I have met has made me very welcome," I told her, "I am very happy here."

"I am so glad, and if there is anything you need, anything at all, you only have to say and I will get it for you."

"How kind you are," I said, "but the hospital has given me everything I could possibly need. Absolutely everything, indeed they have given me more than I need."

"And are you feeling any better, Sonya?"

"Oh, yes, I hope to be able to get up soon. I want to continue my tour. This illness is an interruption."

"Yes, I know," she said sympathetically, "you will have to be patient a little longer. Are you able to do any writing in hospital?"

"Not so far, except that all the time I am writing in my head, but I hope to get something down on paper when I can sit up for any length of time."

"Well, I wish you luck," she said warmly, "I am happy to have spoken to you. Goodbye, Sonya, goodbye."

How kind, I thought, and how typically Armenian.

One afternoon Nara came into my room and we watched an orchestral concert on television. The orchestra played Prokofiev's "Classical Symphony", that delightful *jeu d'esprit* which he wrote in 1916-1917, and then was joined by the soloist for a performance of Brahms' Violin Concerto in D major opus 77. During the introduction to the next work—Stravinsky's ballet suite *The Fire bird*—the television picture broke up.

"I will fix it," said Nara. Like the good engineering student she was, she twirled knobs and pushed buttons expertly. There was still no picture, the sound was breaking it up. Five minutes later I got out of bed.

"I will fix it," I said, and I did, by the simple expedient of bringing the flat of my hand down smartly on the top of the set. Nara looked horrified, but the picture had reappeared and we had no further trouble.

"You are an engineer," she said, laughing.

"That is what I do at home," I said, "when the picture breaks up."

Another day we heard a performance on the radio of Benjamin Britten's opera *The Little Sweep*. It was passing strange to hear such a very English opera in the middle of Armenia.

"We hear quite a lot of British music on the radio," said Nara. "It is very popular everywhere in the Soviet Union."

"Yes," I replied, "so Edward Mirzoyan, the composer, told me."

"Do you hear much Russian and Soviet music in Britain?" she asked. I looked at her in astonishment.

"Good heavens! " I exclaimed. "We have a radio station in Britain called Radio Three which broadcasts Russian and Soviet music almost every day of the year. The British music-loving public couldn't possibly do without it. It is part of our way of life."

The days passed swiftly. When I had first entered the

hospital the leaves on the poplar tree outside my windows were tightly curled buds. As the sunny days went by, bright green leaves opened and opened, each day they were larger until at last I couldn't see the branches any longer. I would lie in bed and watch the little birds who came to the tree hop and play and sing and catch insects and fly away again. There have been few times in my life when I have actually had the time to watch the leaves unfolding on a tree. One day a wide-winged, satiny-black bird came to the tree and perched on the topmost branch. Immobile for several minutes, his hooded unwinking eye concentrated not upon the bright world about him but on some prehistory of his own. I noticed that while he was there, the little birds stayed away. He certainly did look rather predatory.

The hospital day for the patients began about seven o'clock in the morning, although the staff were up and about much earlier than this. No one awakened me, they would wait until I stirred. Then Anita, one of the cleaners on the morning shift, a wide, splay-footed woman with the eyes of a doe, would rumble across my room like a cart driven by oxen and attack the bathroom with her mops and dusters. She was motherly and kind, but she was always too shy to speak to me. She would only nod and half smile but she taught me a lot about Armenian folk music. She would go about cleaning my rooms and sing the songs of her native land in a soft sweet contralto.

Nara told me they were songs of love and death, of the mountains and the stony landscape, of rivers and lakes and fertile valleys. I had already noticed that because Armenian folk music tends to be on the pentatonic scale and is frequently in the minor key, it sounds very much like the synagogue music which I heard as a child. And many Armenian songs and dancés sound like Hebrew camp-fire songs, in fact one of Anita's songs in particular sounded so much like a lively horah that I had learned as an infant that I sang it to her when she paused in her singing. It came as no surprise to me that she recognized the tune and hummed it with me. Nurse Angik's face was a study when she came into my room and found shy Anita and me singing together. When Herignaz cleaned my room that evening I sang the horah to her. She too recognized

the tune and hummed it with me in her funny cracked voice. Why not? Middle Eastern music has a character all its own and music knows no boundaries or barriers of language. That is part of what music is all about. It is the great communicator. It deals with the ineffable, of timeless and universal things.

The hospital in the morning was like a beehive. Great lorries would roar into the courtyard with their daily deliveries of bread and milk and the thousand-and-one supplies a hospital needs. One of the nurses would take my temperature and blood-pressure, and when Nina was on duty she would hover anxiously around my bed, trying to anticipate my every need. Breakfast would usually consist of boiled eggs, bread and butter, and tea without milk or lemon but with several spoonfulls of sugar. Sometimes it would be bread and butter and delicious Armenian jam. Breakfast is often a simple meal in Armenia because meals later in the day are so elaborate.

"What do British people eat for breakfast?" Nara asked. "I have never been to Britain."

"The same as you eat," I replied, "and sometimes fresh grapefruit or cereal with milk."

"Oh," she said, "you will eat cereal? That is good. I will tell Angik." She disappeared and returned shortly afterwards with Angik, who was carrying a tray which she placed on a chair beside my bed. The tray contained a bowl of what looked and tasted like semolina made with sweetened milk and topped with melted butter. It was delicious. I hadn't tasted semolina since my childhood, and never with melted butter.

"In Britain this is food for children," I said.

"Here also," replied Nara, "and it is for patients too."

I finished the semolina and Angik nodded approvingly. I decided to take advantage of this and got out of bed, put on my dressing gown and slippers and went over and opened both the windows in my room and the one in the bathroom. Angik didn't protest. She recognised that this round went to Sonya. We both burst out laughing. Nara didn't understand what was so funny. The running fight about the windows was a private joke between Angik and me.

Being in hospital gave me ample opportunity to prac-

tise eating sliced oranges. Dr. Abgaryan came in one day when I was perfecting my technique.

"I think you do not like our apples," he said, "you leave them and eat oranges."

"It is not that," I replied, "Armenian apples are delicious but in Britain we can grow all the apples we need and we cannot grow a single orange. That is why British people often prefer oranges, because they have to come from abroad."

"Human nature doesn't change," said the doctor, "people always want what is hard to get. It is the same all over the world."

"We are all the same," I agreed.

"Tell me," he asked, "do you really like Armenian food or are you being polite?"

"Oh, no," I replied. "I like it, I am used to it."

"But why are you used to it? You have been to Armenia before?"

"No, I haven't. It's that many of the women in my family cook the same kind of food."

"But why do they?" he looked puzzled. "You are a British family."

"That's right, but we are also a Jewish family, and Jewish food is Middle Eastern, as yours is."

"Ah, so that is why you are so much like an Armenian."

"Am I?"

"You know you are, that is why we all like you so much."

"I must say I feel very much one of you," I said truthfully. "I have never felt so much at home anywhere outside Britain."

"Your skin is much fairer than an Armenian's," he said "but you are like us. Everyone in the hospital has remarked on it."

"There is one good thing about being in hospital here," I said, "if I hadn't become ill I wouldn't have made so many friends and got to know people so well. I am happy here."

"Good, then you will get well quickly."

My musical experience of the Soviet Union continued. Every day there were concerts on the radio and television. The hospital resounded with all kinds of music from

classical and modern folk music to musical comedy, Charles Aznavours, and a wealth of Russian and Western classics and contemporary works. The radio in my room was a powerful one, and I could tune in to wavelengths all over the Soviet Union. I heard an opera from the neighbouring Republic of Georgia. It was *Absalam and Eteri* by Zakhary Paliashvili. It was sung in the Georgian language so I couldn't understand a word of it, but the music spoke to me eloquently enough. Music is my language in anybody's country. It is an interesting opera and one which I had already heard broadcast on the BBC. One afternoon I heard four of Dvořák's "Slavonic Dances"—number 2 in E minor and number 8 in A flat both from his opus 72, and number 5 in A major and number 8 in G minor, both from his opus 46. The "Slavonic Dances" are much loved in Britain and broadcast frequently. What was unusual about this performance was that they were played by a large band of folk instruments, a version of his music with which Dvorák would have been familiar in his native Czechoslovakia.

One evening I tuned in to a concert of Russian national music coming from out there somewhere in the Soviet Union. The concert began with Glinka's overture to his opera *Ruslan and Ludmilla*, and then a baritone sang two songs by Cui. Then there came something which is rarely heard in Britain in spite of the enormous volume of Russian and Soviet music broadcast on the BBC. This was a performance of the First of Rimsky-Korsakov's three symphonies, which received its first performance on December 19, 1865. Cui, who was music critic for a St. Petersburg journal, declared it to be "the first Russian symphony ever written" but strictly speaking this isn't so because there exists an anonymous Symphony on Ukrainian Themes which dates from about 1800. Even this cannot be said to be the first Russian symphony, because the eighteenth century composer, Maxim Berezovsky (1745-1777) wrote a number of symphonies but so far as I know, at the time of this book going to press, most of them still lie unheard in Russian archives.

During the eighteenth century Russian musical taste, particularly in the capital, was mainly under the influ-

ence of Italian opera, and there was no Russian style as such except, of course, the folk music of the countryside. The Napoleonic Wars engendered an ever-growing patriotic feeling in Russia, and at the same time there was a national literary revival initiated by the poet Alexander Pushkin (1799-1837), whose works were to form the basis of many Russian operas and ballets over the ensuing fifty years. The most famous of these include Tchaikovsky's operas *Eugene Onegin* and *The Queen of Spades*, Rimsky-Korsakov's operas *The Golden Cockerel, Tsar Saltan,* and *Mozart and Salieri,* Mussorgsky's opera *Boris Godounov*, Glinka's opera *Ruslan and Ludmila*, and the ballets *The Prisoner of the Caucasus, Ruslan and Ludmilla* and *The Fountains of Bakhchisarai.*

This reaction in music against the Italian influence in particular, and the European influence in general, began with Mikhail Glinka (1804-1857). Brought up on his father's country estate, Glinka heard a great deal of Russian folk music, and concerts given by his uncle's private house-orchestra. The musicians in these privately-owned orchestras were mainly serfs who were often bought and sold at prices commensurate with their degree of skill and musicality. Glinka learned the violin from one of these serfs, and he learned the piano from his governess. He was a gifted linguist and mastered Latin, English, French, German, and some Italian and Spanish.

Glinka went to St. Petersburg where he had three or four piano lessons from "the father of the nocturne", the Irishman, John Field. Bad health forced Glinka to resign from his position in the civil service, whereupon he went to Italy, met Bellini and Donizetti in Milan, and heard much Italian opera. But the urge to write a Russian opera was growing stronger in Glinka. When he was approaching the age of thirty, he went to Berlin and studied long and hard with the great teacher, Siegfried Wilhelm Dehn in order to acquire the technique that would enable him to achieve his aim. The result was his opera *A Life for the Tsar* (1834-1836), as it was called originally. It is now known as *Ivan Susanin* and is an opera which, although to some extent still Italian in style after the manner of Cherubini, contains a strong influence of Russian folk music and examples of Russian melodic

phraseology and rhythm. It also contains the Polish rhythms of the mazurka and polonaise. The elderly Susanin, the hero, is the first of a line of Russian bass heroes of whom perhaps the most famous is Mussorgsky's Boris Godounov.

The first performance of *Ivan Susanin* took place in 1836 in the presence of the Tsar and his family. Afterwards Glinka was appointed choirmaster of the Imperial chapel. His next opera, first produced in 1842, was *Ruslan and Ludmilla.* This was based on Pushkin's long early poem. The poet himself had drawn his inspiration from Russian folklore and fairytales. It was this opera which laid the foundations of a truly Russian national style. Glinka also wrote the fantasia, "Kamarinskaya", which is based on two Russian folk songs. Glinka is one of those composers, like Gluck, whose influence is felt mainly through the music of other composers. He is recognised as the "Father of Russian Music" and as one of the founders of the Romantic movement. Stravinsky said of him, "His music is minor of course, but he is not. All music in Russia stems from him."

Alexander Dargomijsky (1813-1869), Glinka's junior by nine years, was only gradually influenced by the older man's national principles. In 1839 he produced his opera *Esmeralda,* which is based on *Notre Dame de Paris* by Victor Hugo and which is distinctly French in style. In 1856 Dargomijsky produced his opera *Russalka,* and in 1872 the opera *The Stone Guest,* based on the Don Juan theme, was posthumously staged having been completed (at Dargomijsky's request) by two of his friends, Cui and Rimsky-Korsakov. Essentially Dargomijsky lacked the musical talent to continue Glinka's pioneering work, and he was never able to turn his back on the contemporary taste for European music.

The Stone Guest, having disappeared from the repertoire in 1906 when it ran for only seven nights, has recently been enjoying a successful revival at Moscow's Bolshoi Theatre. At the premiere of the new production, the role of Donna Anna was sung by Tamara Milashkina, and that of Don Juan by Vladimir Atlantov.

Many of Russia's foremost musicians, writers and artists appeared in the second half of the nineteenth century,

most of them coming from the provincial "landed gentry". These included Tchaikovsky, Glinka, Pushkin, Diaghilev, Gogol, Turgenev, Tolstoy and the group known as "The Five". Intellectuals celebrated Russian peasant life in music, poetry, literature, ballet, and painting with realistic accuracy. "The Five" were to establish firmly, once and for all time, the Russian national school of music which had been pioneered by Glinka. In chronological order they are Alexander Borodin (1833-1887), César Cui (1835-1918), Mily Balakirev (1837-1910), Modest Mussorgsky (1839-1881) and Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908).

One of the remarkable facts about Glinka, Dargomijsky, and "The Five" is that they were not at first professional musicians. Most of them practised some profession other than that of music at one time or during their entire lives. Thus Glinka and Dargomijsky were in the civil service; Borodin was a medical man, a professor of chemistry at the Academy of Medicine, and the founder of a School of Medicine for Women; Cui was a general in the Russian army and he became an authority on fortification; Balakirev at first considered taking up mathematics as a profession, then worked for five years as an official in the expanding Russian railway system, but as opportunities for a musical career gradually presented themselves, he decided upon music as his life's work; Mussorgsky was at first an officer in the Preobrazhensky guards regiment and then joined the civil service in a minor capacity; Rimsky-Korsakov, the youngest of "The Five", was at first an officer in the Russian navy and later joined the staff of the Conservatoire in St. Petersburg. All of these men, being members of the wealthy or fairly wealthy classes, were brought up in the country and so had the great advantage of a thorough grounding in Russian folk music.

Balakirev, the son of a minor public official in Nizhny Novgorod, met Glinka in St. Petersburg and became one of his most ardent admirers. Spanish as well as Russian folk music interested Balakirev and, at Glinka's suggestion, he wrote his Overture on Spanish Themes. After Glinka's death in 1857, Balakirev dedicated himself to furthering a truly Russian style in music based on Glinka's ideas, a style which would draw its life and

inspiration from the songs, themes, and dances of Russian folklore.

The critic and archivist of the St. Petersburg Library, Vladimir Stassov (1824-1906), was a strong supporter of Balakirev's aims and ideals. From 1856 onwards Balakirev gathered around him a small group of musicians who met regularly for musical evenings. These men had two things in common—a lack of formal musical training and a wish to develop a Russian style in music. The Lithuanian Cui, who had left Vilna to enter the St. Petersburg School of Military Engineering, joined the group at once, having been introduced to Balakirev by Dargomijsky. The third of "The Five" to join the group was the seventeen year old Mussorgsky. He and Balakirev were remarkably gifted pianists and together they studied and analysed the symphonies of Beethoven and played through all of them in piano arrangements. Balakirev gave Mussorgsky some lessons in musical form and in due course the younger man began to try composing. Four years later, in November 1861, the group was joined by the seventeen year old Rimsky-Korsakov. The following year Mussorgsky introduced another budding composer into the musical circle, the twenty-nine year old Borodin. The group of "The Five" was complete.

For several years they met regularly to listen to each other's music, to criticise, and to exchange ideas. Although there were differences of opinion, "The Five" remained united in their determination to evolve a purely Russian musical style free from Western influences.

Tchaikovsky, born in 1840, was a contemporary of "The Five". He had a profound love of Russia and her folk music which inspired him to compose some of his greatest works, but he also needed the ideas of the Western schools. He was friendly with "The Five" particularly with Balakirev and Rimsky-Korsakov, but he never joined the group. He had a lonely, tempestuous, and innately cosmopolitan path of his own to follow.

The relationships within the group of "The Five" are interesting. Borodin and Rimsky-Korsakov instantly became close friends. Mussorgsky and Rimsky-Korsakov were on close, even intimate terms. Between Balakirev and Rimsky-Korsakov there was a teacher-pupil relation-

ship in spite of the fact that Balakirev was the older by only seven years. Their individual temperaments precluded a close friendship. The same more formal kind of relationship existed between Cui and Rimsky-Korsakov.

There were many musicians in the Russia of the 1850s and 1860s who lacked the vision to understand how anyone could be interested in a Russian musical style. Europe, the centre of the musical world, was dominated by the operas of Verdi and Wagner, and by the music of Mendelssohn. Verdi visited St. Petersburg in 1962 to conduct the premiere of his opera *La Forza del Destino*, which the Russians had commissioned, and Wagner paid a visit in the following year. At that time, the newly formed Conservatoire in St. Petersburg was full of German teachers and theoreticians. Anton Rubinstein, the great pianist from southwest Russia and director of the Conservatoire, had a strong German musical training. He was a staunch champion of European musical thought and an implacable opponent of the aims and ideals of "The Five".

Balakirev, however, was not a man to be deflected from his purpose even by such formidable opposition. He was of a dominating, even despotic temperament and had an equally uncompromising attitude towards his own musical ideals. In 1867 he formed, and became the first conductor of, the Free Music Society at which the new Russian music was to be performed. This was the year in which Borodin completed his First Symphony which he conducted, in 1869, at a Free Music Society concert. Also in 1867 (the year after Tolstoy had begun the serialization of *War and Peace*, and Dostoyevsky had published *Crime and Punishment*) Mussorgsky produced his orchestral masterpiece "Night on the Bare Mountain" (also called "Night on the Bald Mountain"). Balakirev disliked and rejected its daring harmonies, but Mussorgsky vehemently defended his work and would not alter it. In the winter of 1867 Berlioz made a return visit to St. Petersburg for a series of concerts of which he and Balakirev were to be the conductors. Rimsky-Korsakov's "Fantasia on Serbian Themes" and *Sadko* were both featured in this series with great success.

In the spring of 1868 Rimsky-Korsakov's *Antar* was completed and later that year, Dargomijsky's *The Stone*

Guest was almost finished and Mussorgsky had completed his setting of Gogol's *The Matchmaker*. It was also in this year that the idea of an opera based on Pushkin's "Boris Godounov" was suggested to Mussorgsky by an authority on Pushkin. A little over a year later the opera was finished. It is a work inspired and enriched by Russian folk music and, after a checkered history, it is now (and has long been) considered to be one of the greatest of all Russian operas.

The concert I was listening to continued with Balakirev's symphonic poem "Thamar", a work which did much to establish his fame. "Thamar" is dedicated to Franz Liszt (1811-1886) who left us the name and the form of the symphonic poem (or tone-poem as it is also called) which dates from the mid-nineteenth century. Balakirev was greatly influenced by Liszt, and we hear this most decisively in the Russian composer's piano music. Balakirev's music is notable for its exotic melodies and rhythms which illustrate the oriental side of the Russian musical temperament, a side reflected in the music of other Russian composers notably Mussorgsky, Borodin, Ippolitov-Ivanov and Stravinsky.

After "Thamar" I heard a *gopak* by Mussorgsky. The *gopak* is an animated dance from the Ukraine in a two-in-a-measure time. It is one of the best known of Russian dances outside its native country, and Mussorgsky's adaptation is a particularly fine example. He is generally considered to be the most truly national member of "The Five", and Russian folk rhythms and themes are a powerful force which permeates his music. Throughout his fairly short life (he died in 1881 at the age of forty-two), he found them a great fountain of inspiration. His "Gopak" was followed by his "Pictures at an Exhibition" in Ravel's orchestral transcription.

From an exhibition in St. Petersburg in 1873 of over four hundred drawings, paintings and designs by Victor Hartmann, who had died earlier that year, his devoted friend Mussorgsky chose ten of the pictures to commemorate him in music. Mussorgsky wrote "Pictures" as a piano solo, but Ravel's orchestral version is played as often as Mussorgsky's, and controversy perennially exists as to which version is the more desirable. Music lovers

На память Милию Алексеевичу
Балакиреву отъ искренняго уважителя
его таланта.
Михаилъ Глинка.

26 Апреля 1856 года. С. П. Бург.

M. I. Glinka (1804-1857). An autographed picture to M. A. Balakirev, April 26, 1856

19 10 Безплатно.

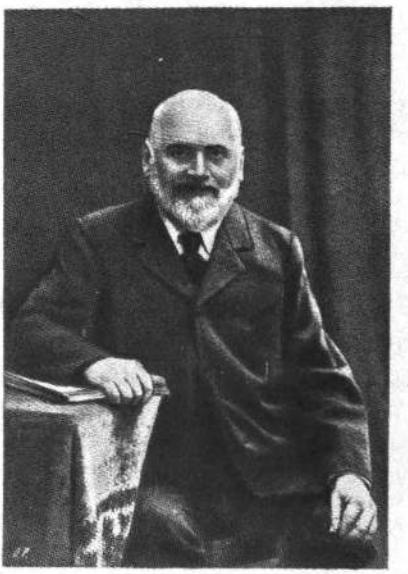
Большой залъ Благороднаго Собранія

№ 181.

Въ Воскресенье, 10-го Октября,

97-е МУЗЫКАЛЬНОЕ УТРО,

ПОСВЯЩЕННОЕ ПАМЯТИ



М. А. БАЛАКИРЕВА

(† 16 мая 1910 г.)

ИСКЛЮЧИТЕЛЬНО ИЗЪ ЕГО ПРОИЗВЕДЕНІЙ.

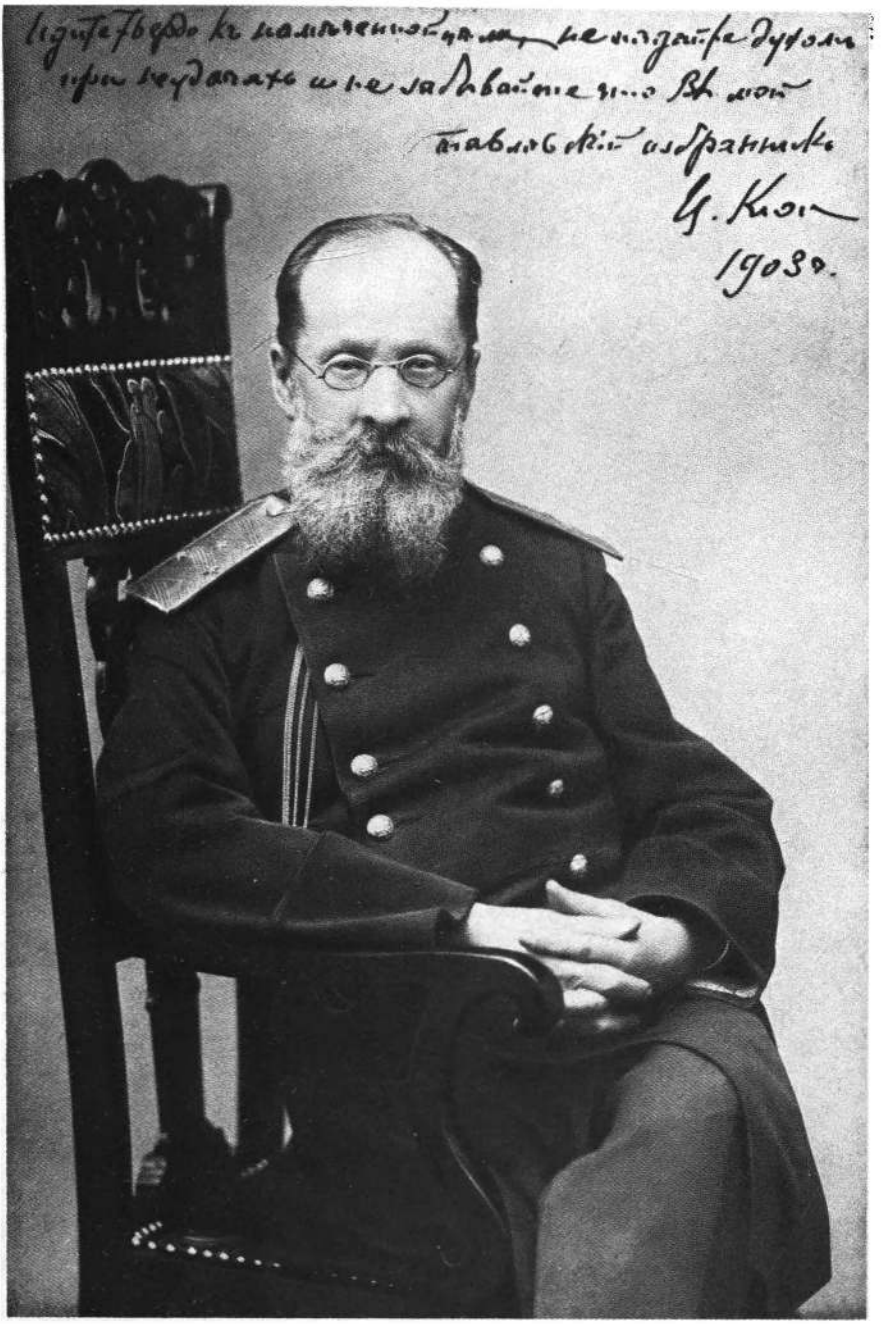
M. A. Balakirev (1837-1910). A programme cover from the 97th "Musical Morning", October 10, 1910

A. P. Borodin (1833-1887)

A. K. Glazounov (1856-1936). An autographed photo to Rozanov, 1908

A. S. Dargomijsky (1813-1869). Steel engraving.
A supplement to the Bauman publication:
Our Notable Figures, 1880

N. A. Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908)



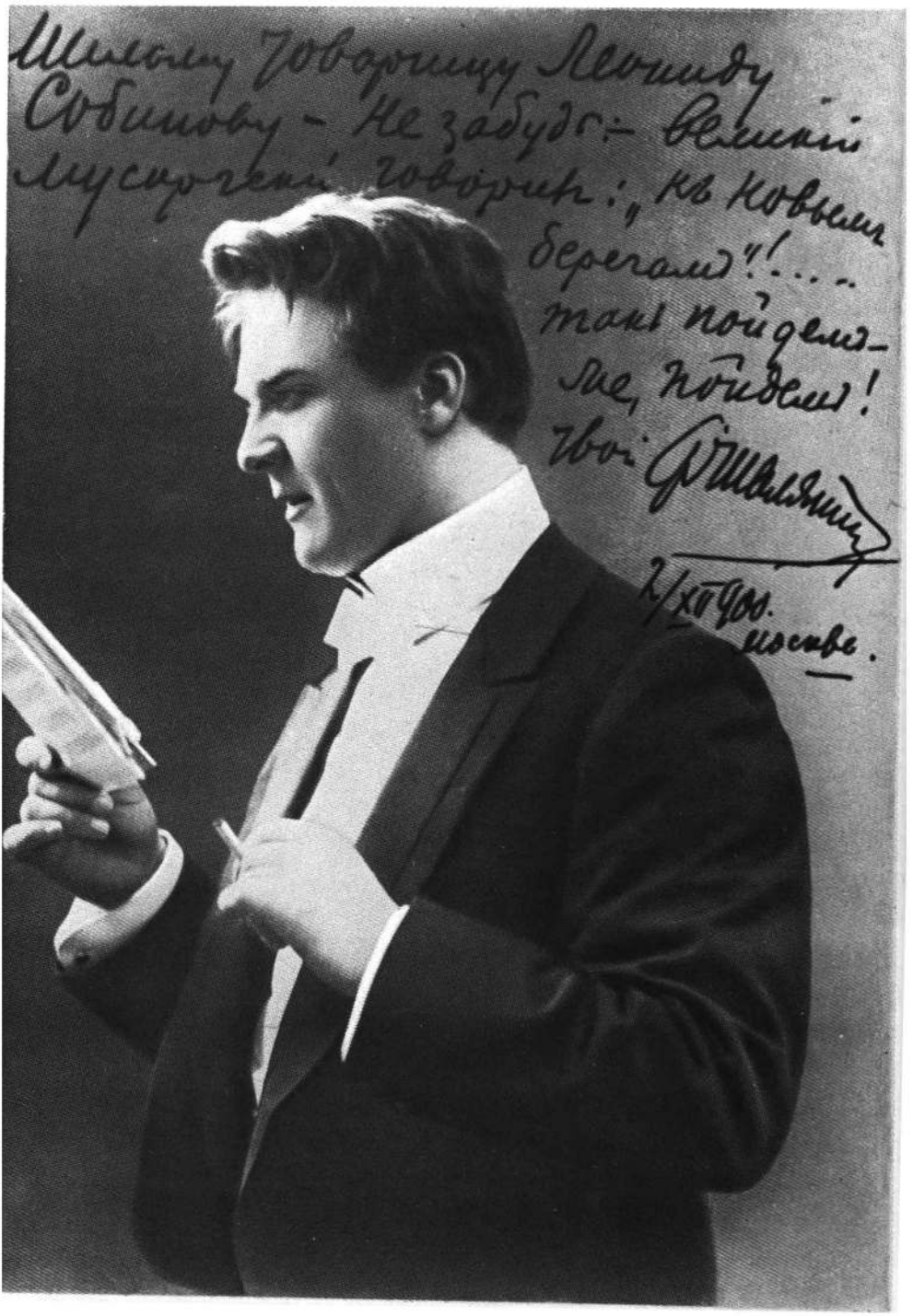
C. A. Cui (1835-1918)

R. M. Glière (1875-1956). An autographed photo presented to Marina Viktorovna Yurgenson as a token of deep admiration and esteem, March 8, 1929

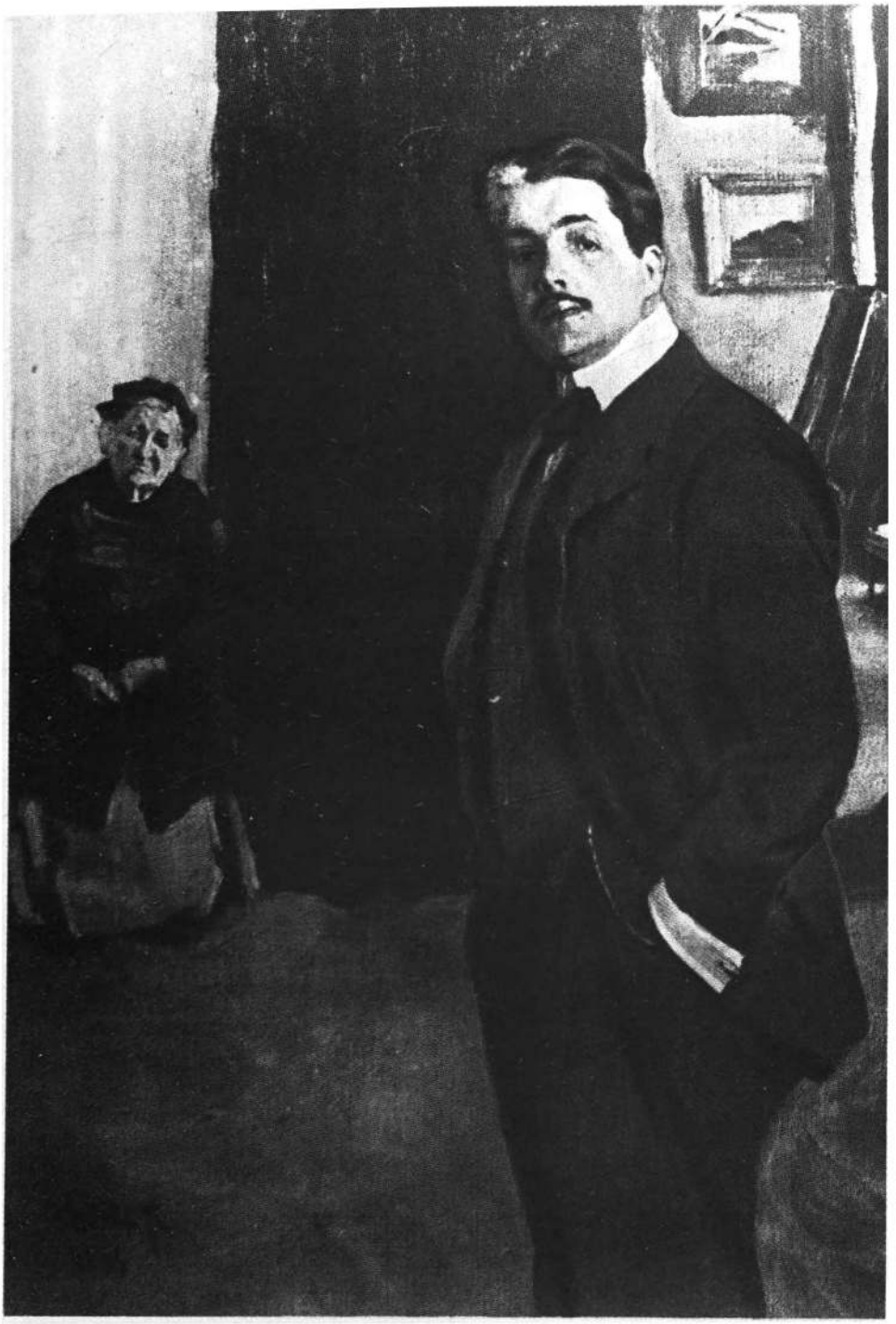
M. P. Mussorgsky (1839-1881)

P. I. Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)

S. S. Prokofiev (1891-1953)

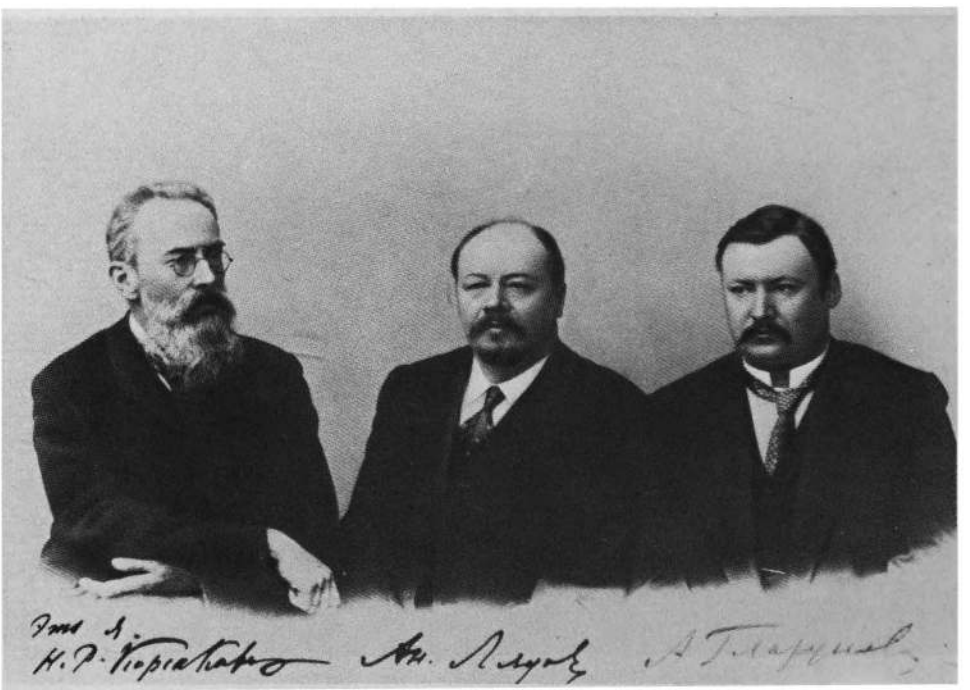


F. I. Chaliapin (1873-1938)



S. P. Diaghilev (1872-1929). Portrait by L. Bakst

F. I. Chaliapin and Saint-Saëns with friends. Paris, 1907



N. A. Rimsky-Korsakov, A. N. Lyadov and A. K. Glazounov, 1905

Anna Pavlova dancing Gisèlle

I.F. Stravinsky and E. M. Mirzoyan

A.Ya. Shtogarenko *(left)* at the VII Congress
of Composers of the USSR, November 1979

tend to have both versions in their record and tape collections, as I have. Mussorgsky's glorious imagination derived his "Ballet of the Chicks in their Shells" from Hartmann's costume designs for a ballet at Moscow's Bolshoi Theatre in 1871. "The Hut on Fowl's Legs", brilliantly depicted in the music, derives from Hartmann's portrayal of a fourteenth century bronze and enamel Russian-style clock which he called "Baba Yaga's Hut on Fowl's Legs". Baba Yaga is the cadaverous witch of Russian folklore, her hut having the legs of a fowl to enable her to pursue her victims without leaving her home. "Pictures" is an example of Mussorgsky "firing on all cylinders".

The concert ended with the Polovtsian Dances from Borodin's opera *Prince Igor*, a work which he left unfinished and which was completed after his death by Rimsky-Korsakov and his young pupil, Alexander Glazounov (1865-1936). Fortunately Borodin managed to find the time in his busy life to write his own libretto, based on the twelfth century epic poem, "The Lay of the Warfare Waged by Igor". In this work he made use of suggestions offered by Stassov, who continued to be greatly in sympathy with the aims and ideals of "The Five". Stassov, incidentally, together with Mussorgsky, did his best to dissuade Borodin, in the spring of 1875, from writing his First String Quartet in A major, the first movement of which Borodin said was "suggested by one of the themes from Beethoven's B flat Quartet opus 130", the theme being the second subject of the finale. In spite of the advice of his friends, Borodin completed the Quartet four years later, in August 1879 and probably Stassov and Mussorgsky were justified in their misgivings, for the A major Quartet was permanently ousted from public favour when Borodin's beautiful, and much finer, Second String Quartet in D major made its appearance.

Prince Igor was first produced at the Maryinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg on October 23, 1890. Half legend and half history, the story depicts the struggles of Christian Russia against the invading pagans from the southwest. The Polovtsian Dances occur in the second Act, which is set in the camp of the Polovtsy, and are performed to entertain the Christian Prince Igor who, with his son Vla-

dimir, has been captured by pagans. Nothing in the opera quite equals the barbaric (what other word can one use?) splendour of the Polovtsian Dances. On stage the scene in the pagan camp becomes a bacchanalia of wild and whirling revelry, slave girls, youths and Tartar warriors joining in the dancing and singing. The Dances made a brilliant finale to this concert of Russian national music.

I switched off the radio and lay down to sleep. I don't know what awakened me in the very heart of the night, because there seemed to be no sound anywhere in the whole world. Not even the faintest of breezes stirred the curtains at the open windows (Angik had gone off duty). The flowers beside my bed gave off their fragrance in the warm air. I left my bed and leaned on the window-sill. The stars were all over the sky, the drowsy night was hushed and the leaves of the poplar tree glowed dimly in the starlight. Suddenly, from across the courtyard and away in another wing of the hospital, I heard the far faint cry of a baby newly born. Its first thin outraged wail pierced the night as it left its mother's womb. How many people, I thought, outside the medical profession actually ever hear a baby being born? I thought of Armenia, the land that the child would always call its own, and I wondered what the baby's future would be. And then I thought of some other baby which was being born at this moment somewhere in Britain, and wondered, too, about its future. What would the world be like when the two children were grown?

One morning, when I had been in hospital for six days, Eleonora came to tell me that arrangements were being made for me to fly back to Moscow. The possibility of my going to Kazakhstan and continuing my journey round the Soviet Union had been in my mind as a bright hope since I had been admitted to hospital. Now I had to accept the fact that the doctors knew more about my condition than I did and had recommended that I rest and have further treatment in Moscow.

Everyone on the hospital floor came to say goodbye to me.

"We shall miss you," said Dr. Abgaryan. "Will you write and tell us how you are?"

"Of course I will."

"You are like one of us."

"I know."

"Dasvidanya, Sonechka." Little Annechka's urchin-doll face looked sad as we kissed goodbye. We had liked and respected each other. Anita rumbled into my room in her sloppy shoes, patted my shoulder, nodded, smiled and went away. The girl who had drawn the frying pan came and put her arms round me.

"Goodbye," she said in Armenian, "Goodbye." She had lost her baby, and although I had sometimes seen her looking whistful, she never complained about her loss and nobody had seen her cry. I laid my hand gently on her abdomen in a gesture of sympathy which she understood.

One of the doctors was going to accompany me to Moscow. This was Edward, one of the anaesthetists. That evening he came to my room to say hello and to see that everything was alright with me. There was the usual crowd of patients in my room and Nara introduced us.

"So I will see you tomorrow," he smiled.

"Yes."

I was up and about when Herignaz came to my room that night. She stood before me nodding her head sadly and then we put our arms round each other in a bear-hug. She kissed my cheek several times, and then made the sign of the cross over me.

The following morning, when I came out of the bathroom, Angik was waiting in my room to say goodbye before going off duty. We clasped each other warmly but she didn't kiss me. That wasn't her way. Nina came as I was packing my bag and, much to my surprise, gave me a shy peck on the cheek, her face blushing rosily. Last of all Nara came to see if I needed any help. Her baby was due to be born within the coming week, and I was sorry that I wouldn't be there to lend encouragement. We exchanged addresses and promised to write. The kitchen staff came to bid me goodbye. They had brought, on doctor's instructions, an enormous plastic bag full of all kinds of fruit, pies, cakes, chocolate and sweets.

"But I don't need all this," I protested. "The hospital in Moscow won't want me to bring all this food."

"It is for you," said Nara. "We want you to take it with you." And I couldn't argue. Was there no end to the kindness of the Armenian people? Edward's wife, who never saw me, sent some pies which she had cooked especially for me. Nara tucked a slab of chocolate and a bottle of Jermuk into the already bulging plastic bag.

"But, Nara, I will be offered mineral water on the plane. You keep the Jermuk."

"No, no," she insisted, "my parents want you to have it."

It was time to go. All the patients and nurses were crowded round the lift to say a final farewell. The benign and motherly woman who was the head of the department accompanied me to the ground floor with one of the nurses. I said goodbye and they wished me good health and happiness and then I walked out of the hospital into the bright Armenian sunshine. Vahan had brought a car to take me to the airport.

After the enclosed world of the hospital, it came as something of a surprise to see that the bustling life of Yerevan and the outside world was going about its business just as it always had. As the car drove away I looked back at the hospital for the last time. Yes, it had been a happy week.

* * *

Edward and I peered out of the window as the plane soared over the bird-haunted solitude of the mountains. It was a glorious, awe-inspiring sight. I saw Mount Ararat quite clearly and close at hand for the first time. I badly wanted to have one of my cameras, but they were stowed away with the luggage. I kept my nose pressed to the glass as long as I could see the mountains and at last they were left behind and the plane climbed up into and above the clouds. Of one thing I was absolutely certain: one day I would return to Armenia, whose very name to me had become synonymous with friendship and happiness.

Satis superque me benignitas tua ditavit – Enough, and more than enough, has your kindness enriched me.

Horace *(Epodon)*

Chapter 5

INTERRUPTED JOURNEY

The hospital in Moscow is a giant modern building of twenty-four floors. I like some modern architecture and I found the front facade of the building so elegantly designed that it seemed to me more like an enormous theatre than a hospital at first sight. Edward and I were met by one of the senior surgeons and by Dr. Vladimir Kazachenko, who was to be responsible for my welfare during my stay.

We all went up to my single room on the sixteenth floor, and I saw that there was a panoramic view right across Moscow. The three doctors discussed my case at some length, but eventually Edward bade me goodbye. The two other doctors went about their work, leaving me to unpack and to explore my new quarters. My room had an entrance vestibule and a private bathroom, and there was a wardrobe unit with plenty of cupboard space and a long mirror. Opposite my bed there was a small refrigerator on the wall. A double French door led onto a continuous balcony which ran along two sides of the hospital. Stepping outside and looking about me, I saw that all the rooms on the sixteenth floor led onto the balcony, and that each floor of the hospital was designed in the same way.

Standing there outside my room I could see right across Moscow as far as the University, which towered on the distant skyline. On misty mornings it would be completely obscured and then, when the mist cleared, the great sharp-spired monolith would emerge as a faint ghostly shape far in the distance. Moscow is an enormous city and the hospital was situated in a new suburb far from the city centre. The view from the balcony never ceased to fascinate me because the light changed from hour to hour.

The day would start in a misty opalescence which enfolded the city, obscuring it from view, and then the mist would gradually disperse until at mid-morning the light had a pearly brightness which made the colours of the trees and flowerbeds and buildings nearby stand out with a vivid clarity. After mid-day the city glowed through scintillating beams of sunlight. Spring had come to Moscow while I had been in the Ukraine and in Armenia and the land was green and the trees in leaf.

A little tired after my long journey from Armenia, I spent much of the first two days resting in bed and the kitchen staff brought in food on a tray. After that Vladimir, my doctor, encouraged me to take my meals in the canteen, where I met all the other patients in the department. The first thing I noticed on my way to the canteen was a poster of Yuri Gagarin on the wall. I soon became familiar with the hospital routine; breakfast was at eight o'clock and every day it was something different. One day it would be boiled eggs, another day scrambled eggs, or cold meats or curd cheese with *smetana.* There was always a choice of cooked cereals—semolina with melted butter, porridge with cream, or rice pudding. I don't know why I had never thought of rice pudding as a breakfast food before, but I soon discovered its virtues first thing in the morning. It is curiously comforting and satisfying at the beginning of the day, and the hospital rice pudding was thick and creamy and the rich colour of pale amber. We all helped ourselves to tea from the big samovar or to milky coffee from a large urn. The tea was drunk without milk or lemon but with large amounts of sugar. I had become accustomed to the large appetites of Soviet people wherever I had been, and accustomed to the raised eyebrows at my moderate eating habits. It was exactly the same at the hospital. Patients, and even the kitchen staff, were always encouraging me to eat more, although I ate quite enough for my needs. On every table at every meal there were two plates of bread, one of black and one of white. If the plate of black bread was used up by the people sitting at my table, someone from another table would immediately bring some black bread from their plate to ensure that I had enough, or if they had none left they would bring some from the kitchen. Everyone

was endlessly kind to me, and showed their concern in many ways. If I finished my glass of tea someone would be sure to pick it up and refill it from the samovar. I had to remind myself to drink my tea more slowly because I never need more than one glass of tea, and I'd be obliged to drink a second one if someone were kind enough to refill my glass.

Lunch was at one-thirty, and the first course was always soup. It was here in the hospital that I tasted *ukha* for the first time. This is a typically Russian fish soup made (usually) with either sturgeon, perch or small freshwater fish. The fish is cooked with fish stock and water, with onions, leeks, parsley, celery, and sometimes cubed potatoes. We were also served mushroom soup, several kinds of borsch, and *rassolnik*, which is made with beef or chicken stock, sliced beef kidneys, parsley, celery, onions, potatoes, lettuce or sorrel, chopped dill, *smetana* and some salted cucumbers. One of the cooks would ladle the soup of one's choice into big, old fashioned soup plates.

The main course of lunch was steak, chicken, or meat pie or a kind of beef Stroganov with several kinds of vegetables or salads.

There were twenty or so patients who used this particular canteen, and the cooks seemed to provide sufficient food for twice that many people, but the patients ate heartily and there was hardly any left over. What was left over, I was impressed to see, went straight into a metal container with a lid and I was told this food was used to feed animals. It is not in the Soviet character to waste anything.

As the word went quickly round the hospital floor that there was a foreigner in their midst, the patients put themselves out to be helpful to me. One would notice that I had forgotten to take some cucumber from the communal bowl and would hasten to remedy this. Another would notice that I hadn't collected my tablets from the nurses' desk and would bring them to my room. Yet another would meet me strolling on the balcony and, seeing that I wasn't wearing a coat, would implore me to put one on. One patient even hurried into her room and came out with a woollen scarf which she wound

round my neck. It could sometimes get chilly sixteen floors up, even in that lovely Moscow spring. One patient introduced me to her husband, a medical student who could speak some English. He was interested to hear about the British medical service and seemed surprised when I told him that hospital treatment in Britain is free of charge, as it is in the Soviet Union.

The patients came from all walks of life. There were the wide-bodied peasants who shuffled around in sloppy shoes and short floral dresses and who wore headscarfs tied under the chin from morning till night. These women sat together at certain tables for their meals and kept to themselves. They didn't seem to speak to anyone else. Their table manners were not dainty. Like peasants the world over they kept their noses right down in their plates and shovelled in their food in great heaping spoonfulls. They seemed to eat everything with a spoon, even meat and vegetables. We, the fastidious ones with manicured fingernails, who used knives and forks as well as spoons, naturally gravitated together at other tables. There isn't a class structure in the Soviet Union as we know it in Britain. It is simply that "birds of a feather flock together" wherever one is.

Inevitably certain characters emerged. There was Clara, a spectrally thin, fine-featured woman with white, dramatically upswept hair who had certainly missed her vocation as an actress. Not only her hair but everything about Clara was white. She was a study in white. She had bloodless lips on which she would sometimes, in the evenings, wear a bright lipstick which contrasted dramatically with her chalky skin. Even her eyes were a bluish white, and they habitually wore an expression of martyred resignation. I don't know exactly what illness had put her in hospital, but whatever it was she was certainly making the most of it. She belonged in the last act of Verdi's *La Traviata.* She even wore her hospital dressing gown with a histrionic air. I liked Clara at once and, as so often happens when we take a liking to someone, she liked me too. She would make a point of sitting with me at meal times, usually opposite to me at the same table, so that I soon learned that she also had a histrionic way with her food. She would regard her plate of soup with a slow, sad shake

of her fine head, then she would pick up a spoon and take a tiny sip and then another, crumble a piece of bread in her white fingers, put down her spoon and push the plate away, her face a mask of tragedy. The next two courses would meet the same fate. A piece of steak or chicken would be tasted and rejected, a salad would be pushed aside, a wedge of apple pie with thick cream (irresistible to the rest of us) would fare no better. This pushing away of plates of food with a dramatic gesture was all the more startling because at some time during the course of the meal, Clara would pull all her plates back one by one and eat everything up, though with many sighs and grumbles. We sat at the same table for almost every meal and this happened every time. At first I was concerned that she was too frail to eat a proper meal, but that notion was quickly dispelled. The wraithlike Clara had the appetite of a lorry driver.

Irina was one of the most cheerful souls I have ever met. A big blonde somewhere in her forties with twinkling grey eyes, she had a smile for everybody. It was a pleasure to see her coming into the canteen or to meet her out walking on the balcony or in one of the hospital corridors. She carried around with her an aura of good-natured geniality, she laughed a lot and even the tragic Clara sometimes essayed a faint pulling out of her lips when Irina was sitting at our table and making us all chuckle. One day Irina wasn't at breakfast and she wasn't at lunch and in fact we didn't see her for two whole days. On the third day her smiling face appeared at breakfast at the usual time and she sat down with Clara and me. One side of Irina's dressing gown was draped over her shoulder, hiding her arm. I looked at her and wondered what had happened. She smiled at me and drew aside her dressing gown to disclose a thick, heavy bandage. Her right arm had been amputated almost at the shoulder. I felt my eyes fill with tears. Why did that have to happen to a woman like Irina, I thought. She acknowledged my sympathy, flipped her dressing gown straight, and got on with eating her rice pudding with the spoon held awkwardly in her left hand. Even Clara couldn't eat her breakfast that day.

Vanya was the seven year old son of Natalia, one of

the cooks, a blonde, scrubby-haired, blue-eyed little fellow with a snub nose and a shy wide grin. He wanted to learn some English and so sometimes in the evening after supper we would sit down together for a while and he would try to get his tongue round the unfamiliar sounds. He did well. I think that he might speak good English one day. Natalia would sit at the table with us, beaming proudly but not attempting any English herself. I think she was too shy. She was very kind to me and was always ready to close the window of the canteen if she thought I was sitting in a draught. She wasn't to know that I like sitting in a draught. If she were near the samovar when I wanted a glass of tea, she would always go out of her way to pour it out for me, stirring in at least five more spoonfuls of sugar than I actually wanted. But her kindness was unmistakable.

Gallina was from Georgia. She shared a double room a few doors along the balcony from mine, so we saw a lot of each other and often walked and ate together. Her home was in Tbilisi where she worked in the Museum of Arts. I never discovered what her illness was, but sometimes when we were sitting together at meal times she would break down in sudden tears and weep inconsolably. Several of us, including Clara and Irina, would cluster round her in sympathy, but she never told anyone what was grieving her and her tears would stop as suddenly as they had started. Usually she was very cheerful and outgoing and liked to share a joke. We became good friends, and I promised I would visit her if I ever went to Tbilisi. I am almost certain to see Gallina again because Tbilisi is one of those places at the top of my list of "musts" when I next visit the Soviet Union.

The medical student who could speak some English came to visit me again and told me something about the Soviet health service. Under the Constitution of the USSR every Soviet citizen is guaranteed the right to health care from highly qualified medical practitioners, free of charge. The Soviet health service considers disease prevention to be a major priority. There is a branch of medicine which is practised by doctors who do not come into direct contact with the patients. Their main area of activity is to monitor the condition of the atmosphere, the water, all

foodstuffs and the whole range of manufactured goods with which the public comes into contact. Doctors from the sanitary-epidemiological service vaccinate nearly a hundred and fifty million people every year against dangerous infections, many of which have now been eradicated.

During their first year of life all children are vaccinated against tuberculosis, tetanus, poliomyelitis, diphtheria, measles and whooping-cough. More than a hundred million people a year have complete medical checkups. In this way, diseases are detected at an early stage, making treatment easier and more effective. The Soviet health service has preventive treatment health centres where patients at risk of various diseases are examined several times a year and given preventive treatment. There are fifty million people registered at these centres.

The Ministry of Public Health has introduced certain changes in its personnel policy. Nowadays some sixty percent of medical graduates go to work at clinics in towns and in the countryside, the other forty percent going to work in hospitals. In recently built hospitals there are departments in cardiac, endocrinological and other specialized areas of medicine, and there are centres for the treatment of vascular disorders and for diagnosis. In 1979 a Mother and Child Health Care centre was opened in Moscow, its main task being to ensure the birth of healthy children. Research is being conducted in the field of painless childbirth, and there are ten thousand maternity consultation centres in the Soviet Union which ensure the care of expectant mothers from the earliest months of pregnancy. The first department of pediatrics was opened at the Second Moscow Medical Institute in the early 1930s. There are now nearly fifty centres specializing in cardiac medicine where heart surgery is performed. In 1982 an Open Heart ward was opened at the Institute of Clinical and Experimental Surgery in Moscow. There is a new centre in Moscow for the treatment of cancer which has a staff of six thousand, and this is only a fraction of the vast nationwide cancer treatment service in the Soviet Union. My visitor was equally interested to hear about the health service in Britain.

My room was equipped with a control panel whereby one could summon a nurse, or have a bedside or bright light at the touch of a button. I also had a radio which provided me with hours and hours of musical interest and pleasure. The music started very early in the morning and continued until late at night. The first thing I heard was Mozart's Symphony number 39 in E flat followed by Leonora's great aria from Beethoven's *Fidelio* sung in Russian. Beethoven's Violin Concerto followed with the late David Oistrakh as soloist. Beethoven is much loved in the Soviet Union and during my two weeks in the Moscow hospital I heard nearly all of his nine symphonies—the Choral Fantasia, the Overtures "Egmont", Leonoras One and Two, and "Coriolanus", the Triple Concerto, and several of the piano sonatas.

Of the Russian and Soviet composers, it was obvious whom the Soviet people love best. Tchaikovsky, of course. It is the same in Britain. The Soviets also love Prokofiev, Shostakovich, Glinka and "The Five", Glière, Scriabin, and Myaskovsky. One night when Gallina, Clara, and Irina had said goodnight and gone to their rooms, I listened to a broadcast of Shostakovich's Symphony number 7, (the "Leningrad"). This massive work was written in 1941. Shostakovich was living in Leningrad at the time and composed the first three movements during the terrible siege which the Nazis had imposed upon the city. Microfilm of the score of the symphony was somehow flown out of the Soviet Union, and the work was performed in every great musical centre in the world. It's first British performance was a broadcast from a BBC studio with Sir Henry Wood conducting. This was on June 22, 1942. The symphony has four movements: the first depicts the pleasant life of the Soviet people interrupted by war, the second is a lyrical intermezzo, the third is a moving adagio, and the fourth celebrates victory and a beautiful life in the future.

Although it was quite late at night, the "Leningrad" Symphony had left me wide awake and so I left the radio on and heard a performance of the symphonic poem, *Antiar* by Rimsky-Korsakov. As I listened to its first theme I was vividly reminded once again, and for the hundredth time, of Wagner's "Ring" and the weird, other-worldly

chords of the Tarnhelm theme first heard in "Das Rheingold", and the strange progressions of the Annunciation of Death in the second act of "Die Walküre". Rimsky-Korsakov uses a progression of alternate tones and semitones in the third movement of *Antiar* with striking harmonic effect and with suggestions of some Western influences, particularly that of Liszt. *Antiar* was given its first public performance in March 1869 at one of the Russian Musical Society's concerts.

The doctors were adamant that I should rest and recover my strength, and that I should not even think of continuing my journey around the Soviet Union just then. Although I said nothing, I vehemently disagreed with them because I felt well enough after two week's hospital care in Moscow to proceed as I had planned. But doctors just don't see things in the way that writers do. They have their job to do and they do it well. To them health comes first and no one would wish it otherwise. But with writers, writing usually comes first and that is the difference. Besides, I had always been extremely healthy until this recent indisposition, and my health had always taken care of itself and I had no doubt whatsoever that it would continue to do so. However, because the doctors in Moscow were so adamant, I agreed to an acceptable compromise suggested by my friends in Moscow who wanted me to continue my musical journey, but who wanted even more that I should first completely recover my health.

"Get well first," they said, "and then come back to the Soviet Union and do another book."

I agreed thinking that probably the doctors were right and that my friends were right. I would come back to the Soviet Union as soon as I was well, and continue my interrupted journey. It was only the thought of that which enabled me to come to terms with leaving the Soviet Union when I did.

My doctor, Vladimir, came to say goodbye.

"I am sorry that you are leaving the Soviet Union before your journey is finished, Sonya."

"Thank you, Vladimir, so am I."

"You will come again to the Soviet Union?"

"Oh, I will."

"You will let me know how you are?"

"Of course."

We clasped hands and said goodbye. He had taken great care of me and done everything he could to make things easier for me. I did not know how to express my gratitude, but perhaps my parting smile did it for me. I hope so.

Clara dabbed at her eyes with a white handkerchief. To my astonishment she said in English, "Safe journey home, Sonya. Good luck, good luck." She had gone to the bother of learning some English to wish me goodbye and good luck. I was deeply touched, and we kissed each other and promised to write. Irina enfolded me in a bear-hug with her strong left arm.

"*Dasvidanya*, Sonechka." She and Gallina were the only ones in the Moscow hospital who used this form of my name. The emotional Gallina kissed me on both cheeks and spoke in a fast Georgian which I couldn't begin to understand, although her meaning was clear.

"You promise that when you come to our country again you will come to Georgia?"

I nodded. "I promise."

"And you will come to see me in Tbilisi?"

"Yes."

"You won't forget?"

"No, of course not."

Her eyes were full of tears as we said goodbye. I was sad too. We had been good friends.

I had a steady stream of visitors that last day in Moscow. Many of the patients and hospital staff came to say goodbye, to wish me well, and to say, "Come back soon to our country" and I said that I would, and I will. Natalia the cook came to my room with a goodbye present. It was a plate full of big Russian sugar cubes. She wanted to give me something and this was her way of being kind. She had become firmly convinced that I was fond of sugar (which I am not) because I drank the glasses of tea which she had poured out for me and had so prodigiously sugared. I gave her a bar of chocolate for her son, Vanya, and we shook hands.

"Goodbye," she said shyly in Russian.

"Goodbye, Natalia, and thank you."

The last goodbye was said. I went out onto the balcony

and looked across Moscow and could not look enough. How is it possible to say goodbye to Moscow, I thought, and then knew that this was not goodbye at all but au revoir. I would see Moscow again. I would come back to the Soviet Union for another musical journey which would not be interrupted. Examining the culture of this land had been an adventure, a journey rich with vibrant experience, musically and otherwise. The culture of the Soviet Union is available to all, not just to a privileged few. That was to me the most inspiring thing of all for I have seen it nowhere else. Every other country I have seen has its own culture, but only for the privileged minority with the money and the leisure. In the Soviet Union, the highest forms of art are easily and cheaply available to every Soviet citizen.

Of the many impressions which I carried away with me, one which lingers in my mind is that right at the top of every cultural tree in the Soviet Union I saw people of my own race—Jewish composers, writers, conductors, pianists, singers, violinists, choreographers, painters, directors, producers and the rest. It is the same in Britain.

A profound need for, and appreciation of, the higher things of the mind is evident in this historically young country. It manifests itself as a thirst for knowledge, a consuming wish to understand both its own culture and that of the rest of the world—a collective characteristic to which can be attributed the cultural achievements of the Soviet Union. It is a country in which music isn't something apart, it is a living part of the landscape. The Soviet Union appears to us in the West to turn out artistic geniuses as though from a conveyor belt. While I was there I saw for myself how they achieve this. The point is that the Soviet Union will not waste the talent of even one individual. Talent to the people of this land is something precious, something to be carefully nurtured. It would never be allowed to languish on a factory floor.

I will always remember the earnest young faces in the music schools poring over well-thumbed scores, the violins, flutes, clarinets, 'cellos and all the instruments of the orchestra singing in the hands of young Soviets, some of whom will one day be world-famous musicians. I will always remember the dancer rehearsing a scene from *Gisèlle*

who bore such an uncanny resemblance to the portrait of Carlotta Grisi, who created the role as long ago as 1841.

And how could I ever forget Mozart's "Eine Kleine Nachtmusik" played by children on recorders, and the tenor in *May Night* whose voice went into such a thrilling overdrive above the stave? How could I forget the rising young dancer who, trying too hard, lost his balance in the middle of a rehearsal and landed on his bottom instead of on his feet? And how could I forget the mop-haired twelve year old bassoonist in mortal combat with Stravinsky in the corner of a room where a ping-pong game was in furious progress? How could I forget the symphonic soundscapes of Brahms in the middle of Armenia? How could I forget any of it? This, my first visit to the Soviet Union, was the musical journey of a lifetime.

Based on the notes made during the author's trip round the Soviet Union, this book offers a survey of the musical scene in this big country with its rich cultural heritage.

The author describes the forms and methods, through which the younger generation in the Soviet Union is given an appreciation of the arts, and shows how contact with the beautiful world of harmony of sound and movement has grown, for millions of people, into a passion and a daily need, adding substance and spice to their lives.

There is an exposition of the history of the evolution of musical culture of the USSR.

Focus is placed on its diverse multinational music, showing that the true national spirit is the inexhaustible source of the power and charm of music and that its major task in Soviet society is to develop the harmonious individual with lofty moral principles.

Sonya Richmond, author and journalist, was born in the county of Lancashire in the North-West of Great Britain. An Arts graduate, she also read for the Bar at the Inns of Court in London. Her books include *Yoga and Your Health*, *The Art of Chinese Cooking*, *International Vegetarian Cookery*, and *Common Sense about Yoga*. She has also written scripts for musical plays for the theatre and plays for radio. Her first novel *The Wrong Sister* is to be published in the United States.

She is married to the Welsh writer, John Summers, and they live by the sea on the South coast of Wales.

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